



ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims
Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

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It was the year 1939, a time in which significant events took place, events which changed the course of history. I lived in Cracow, one of the largest cities in Poland, a beautiful, medieval city with many historical buildings and monuments. Castle Wawel is one of the remarkable historical sites.

It was a beautiful autumn day. I was sitting with my friend on a bench in a city park. The sun was shining brightly, yet it was not as hot as in summertime.

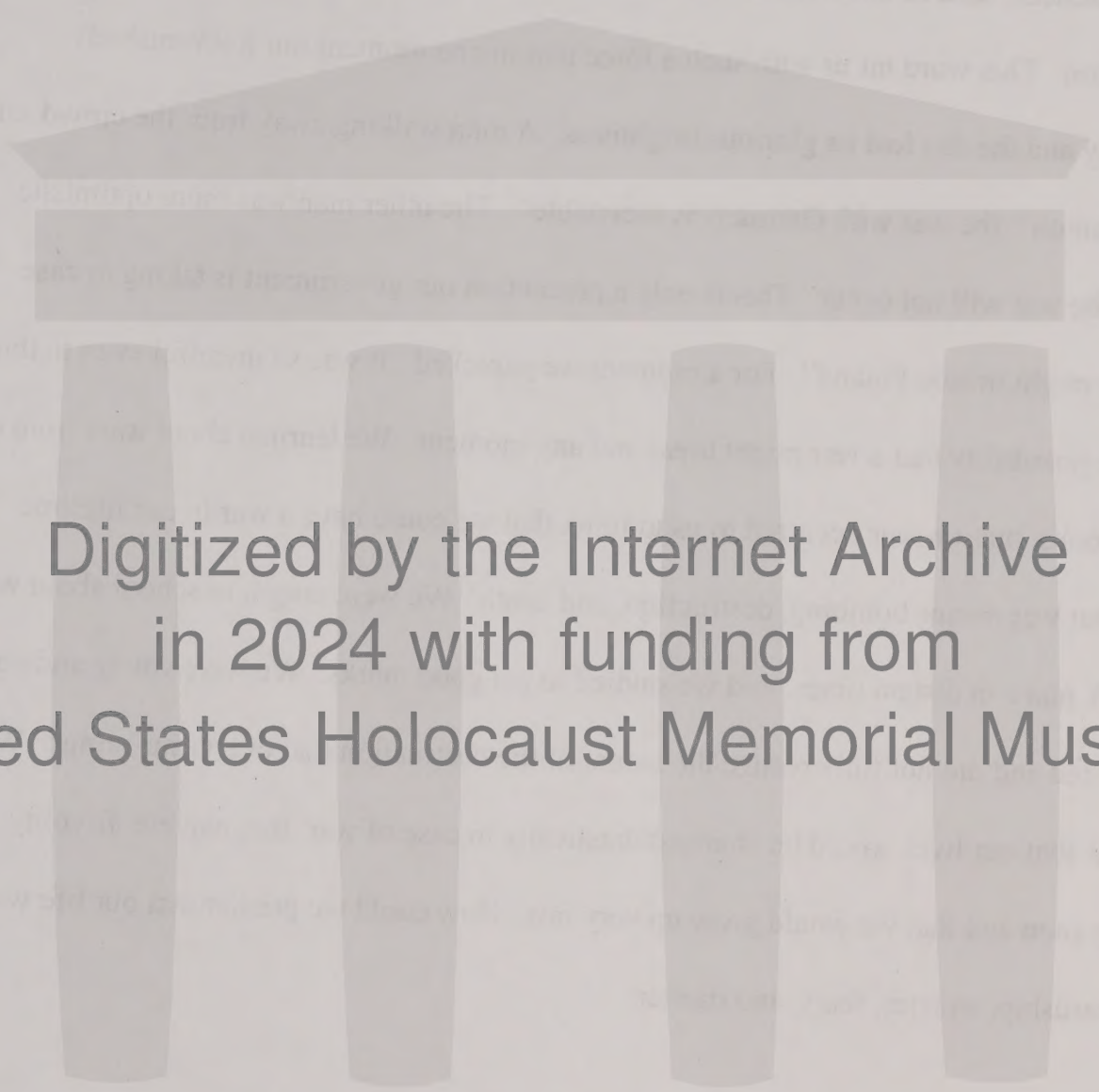
Trees and bushes growing side by side were basking in the sunlight, emphasizing the red, orange and yellow colors of the leaves. There were colorful leaves all over on the ground, falling down with autumn breezes. The air was fresh and aromatic. One felt so good to sit there, carefree, without any worries, enjoying the beauty of nature. The children played joyfully, laughing and screaming. Their mothers or baby sitters watched them closely. A young couple was deeply absorbed in a conversation, oblivious to the surroundings. They looked in each others eyes with an expression of love and devotion. An old man observed them with a mixture of jealousy, sympathy and nostalgia. My friend, Sydia, was a pretty girl with dreamy eyes and the complexion of a ripe peach. Her blue-greenish eyes were smiling as she turned her face toward me: "Isn't it a splendid day?" she said. I agreed. We talked about all kinds of frivolous things, jumping from one subject to another. We giggled a lot because everything seemed so funny and made us laugh.

Suddenly we noticed that a large crowd of people was standing in the front of the entrance to the park. The unusual sight of this gathering aroused our curiosity. Something had

happened. “Let us go find out what is going on”, I said to Sydia. We started to run as fast as we could to the entrance of the park. There was a poster placed on the gate. People were pushing one another, eager to read the contents of the poster. People were excited, talking nervously in abrupt sentences, hard to understand. Our ears caught only one word clearly. An ominous word: mobilization. This word hit us with such a force that in one moment our joy vanished completely and the day lost its glorious brightness. A man walking away from the crowd said to his companion “the war with Germany is inevitable”. The other man was more optimistic. “Maybe the war will not occur. This is only a precaution our government is taking in case Germany might invade Poland”. For a moment we panicked. It was so dreadful even to think about the possibility that a war might break out any moment. We learned about wars from our history books, but it never occurred to us to think that we could have a war in our lifetime. We sensed that war means bombing, destruction, and death. We were taught in school about wars That took place in distant times, and we studied to get good marks. We were young and not experienced and did not fully realize the extent of the destruction that every war brings. We did not know that our lives would be changed drastically in case of war; that naiveté, frivolity, would end very soon and that we would grow up very fast. How could we predict that our life would be full of hardship, worries, fears, and danger.

We were so excited and overwhelmed by emotions that we could not talk but in silence hurried home to our families to share with them the bad news.

CHAPTER 2



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When I entered our apartment, my family and our neighbors were gathered in the living room. Their drawn faces, nervous gestures and raised voices gave the impression that they were discussing something of great importance. “Mobilization”, I uttered and stopped. I hardly could catch my breath and my heart was pounding fast from running. “We already heard the bad news”, someone said. My family was distressed because my brother had received notice to report to the nearest mobilization center on the next day. Uncertainty about the immediate future gravely hung over our lives. The next day Leo was mobilized and joined his military unit. We said good-bye to Leo, we kissed him and our eyes were filled with tears and our hearts ached seeing him leaving us. The possibility of war made us nervous and was the main topic of our daily conversations. Everyone was waiting for news. One question was on everybody’s mind: “will there be war or will there not be war?”

Anxiously people were waiting for an answer. Newspapers were sold out immediately after being put out on the stands. It was the main source of information, because few people had radios in that time. There were a lot of rumors, but one could not depend on them. Some people used to listen on radios to news transmitted from foreign stations. Some rumors were completely false. We lived in tension, and prayed to God that Germany would not start a war. After days of uncertainty, and hope that the war would be avoided, the worst prediction proved to be true. On September 1, 1939, the war broke out. Germany, the Third Reich, proclaimed war. The Germans attacked Poland.

CHAPTER 3

Looking back to that eventful time one should wonder how was it possible that the world was so ignorant, so completely blind, as to be unaware of what was going on inside Germany. For years Germany was building up its military might and preparing for a holy mission to conquer the world, to enslave other nations. How was it possible that politicians, heads of governments, political leaders, etc., did not notice the trends and sentiments existing in the Third Reich and did not see where the goals and aspirations of the Germans lead. Their charismatic leader did not hide anything, but with fire in his eyes, and with a loud, strong voice proclaimed his ideological views. And how blind was the world Jewry not to realize that what he wrote in his book "Mein Kampf" was a prologue to his satanic plans for the Jewish nation. It was not an abstract tale, but a dangerous blueprint for reality. The world was not prepared militarily or psychologically to go to war with Germany. They paid for this dearly. The war with Poland did not last long. Well organized, well equipped, modernized, the German army in several days smashed, destroyed the Polish army. There were some sporadic resistance, Polish military units dispersed, decimated, gave in. The battalion in which my brother served was almost completely annihilated. Some soldiers escaped, and many were taken as prisoners of war and put into camps. Poland, as an independent country ceased to exist. A Polish government was formed in London, England, to plan some resistance. Several underground organizations were active in Poland to engage in sabotage and terrorist acts. A new frightening chapter of Jewish history, with tragic outcome, started to unroll. How distinctly in my memory was imprinted the first view of German soldiers proudly marching through the streets of Cracow. Disciplined, arrogant, aloof, with stern faces they gave the impression that they wanted to announce to the onlookers, "We are the Germans, pure Aryans who are above other nations, we are going to conquer the

world, we will be the rulers who will decide about your fate”. “Deutschland, Deutschland uber alles”, they sang, "Germany above everything".

Chapter 4

In the first days after the German invasion, Cracow looked like a ghost town. The inhabitants of the city were afraid to go out from their homes, not knowing what could happen to them. Many posters were placed on the walls of the houses with all kind of announcements. People had no other choice but to accept the new reality and to try to adjust to new circumstances. There was no way of changing the existing state of affairs but to try to deal with the new ruling body and to follow their orders and different restrictions.

Gradually life returned to some kind of normalcy. Normalcy, in the sense that businesses were open, as well as schools. The new reality was that we were under German occupation. Poland did not exist as an independent, sovereign state. Once again in Polish history, German invaders occupied Polish soil. There was no more war. The war formally was ended. Some soldiers came back home, many, many were killed and many, many were taken away to captivity.

My brother was not among the soldiers who came back home and we did not know what had happened to him. Was he killed, or was he taken as a prisoner of war? Uncertainty about his fate was almost unbearable. Days went by and still there was no news about my brother. We were despairing. How painful was merely the thought that our brother Leo, so young, full of life might be killed in war. We went to soldiers who came back from the war to inquire if they know

about his fate. We talked to many soldiers, but nobody knew him or heard about him. Our hope started to fade. Unexpectedly, one day I met a young soldier who came back from the war and I showed him my brother's picture and asked him if he saw my brother. He said to me, “yes, I saw your brother alive”. One can imagine my feeling of happiness. But later, when I started to analyze his assertive answer, I was thinking, “Maybe he told me the truth or maybe he lied, seeing how much I was in despair. He wanted to comfort me”. But from this moment we had hope that he was alive. That helped us to go on with our daily routines.

After several months of hoping and waiting in vain for any news about him our hope again began to weaken. But one day we got a wonderful surprise. We received a postcard from the Red Cross informing us that our brother was alive and a prisoner of war in a camp in Germany. It is hard to describe our feelings of surprise, disbelief, and happiness. This was the moment for which we had waited and dreamed and prayed. We read the postcard many times, to make sure that we had not misread the contents, that it was true, he is alive. We even thought that the Red Cross could make a mistake. This pessimistic thought marred our happiness. When, after a short period of time, a letter came from my brother, our doubts vanished completely. To see his handwriting gave us such a great joy. After several months being in camp my brother returned home. We were so happy to see him alive and healthy, though he had lost some weight and his face was drawn. The Germans released all Jewish prisoners of war. One could ask a simple question, “why had the Germans released only Jewish prisoners ?” It looked rather suspicious and suggested a possibility that maybe the Germans had in mind some other plans for the Jewish soldiers. Could someone be so naïve as to trust the Germans and believe that they favor Jews more than other nationalities, keeping them in camps while giving the Jews

freedom. We were too happy to see Leo to even consider it anything but a blessing that he was once again home with us.

My brother was so glad to be home and was in good spirits. His story about how he survived was unbelievable. Almost all the soldiers in his company were killed and the rest were captured. He and another soldier managed to escape. They ran away, not looking back to see if German soldiers were shooting after them. They took a great risk. They jumped into the river "Pszczyna" which was not far away and were swimming most of the time under the water, not to be seen. They noticed a single, white painted house standing alone not far from the river. Wet, tired and shivering they reached the house unnoticed and they hid themselves in the barn. As it turned out the house belonged to a Pole who was obviously of German origin, because he spoke German fluently. When he found them hiding, he called German soldiers, who took them away. Luckily they did not kill them. My brother was particularly fortunate that they did not recognize that he was Jewish, the other soldier was a Pole.

German soldiers put them in a prisoner of war camp. Life in the camp was not the best place to be. One needed survival skills to handle different problems and situations which emerged every day. He used to trade cigarettes for bread, because he was not a smoker, and additional portion of bread satisfied his hunger. The ration of bread which he was getting was not enough, and being young he needed more calories than he received. So most of the time he was hungry. This is why for the first couple of days at home he ate constantly. Later he returned to his normal eating habits and did not think much more of his stay in the prisoner of war camp. Besides now he had other problems to deal with, leaving no time to dwell on the past.

People got used to life under the German occupation, or to not having any way of changing it. They had no other choice but to go on with their daily routines and responsibilities.

There was tension in the air, uneasiness of unpredictable happenings. Everyday various announcements and orders to be carried out by the general population appeared on the walls of public houses. There were new restrictions and regulations which concerned only Jewish life. One day they ordered all Jews to wear bands marked with a Star of David on their arms, to distinguish them from the other Polish population. Every order had to be obeyed – disobedience was punishable by death.

I had a friend, Bronek, who lived in Katowice when the war broke out. They, he and his parents, left the town, in which a lot of Germans reside and came to live in Cracow. One day, at four o'clock in the morning someone was knocking at our door. Surprised, wondering who could be?; my sister got up and before opening the door she asked, "who is this?" A boyish voice answered, "it is Bronek I want to talk to Lonka."

I wondered what happened to him that he came so early in the morning. I dressed myself in a hurry and went out with him for a walk. I looked at him. His handsome face was pale, his blond hair matted and disheveled. Lonka he said," my parents decided to leave Cracow. My father says that the situation of Jews is getting worse every day and he is going to try to leave the part of Poland occupied by the Germans and try to cross the border.' (To get into the part of Poland which Russia occupied, having made a deal with Germany.) " Lonka," he said, " come with us, my mother will take good care of you. I don't want to be separated from you because I

am afraid that I never will see you again.” I looked into his sad blue eyes and I felt a lump in my throat. He was my friend, my best friend with whom I shared my thoughts and feelings. He was dear to me. How beautiful was our friendship, so innocent, so idealistic. “I am sorry I said. I can't, leave my family and run away. My family would not let me go. I am too young to make my own decisions.” He did not stay long because they told him to come back quickly since they had to leave right away. “Good bye Lonka” he said softly, “take care of yourself.” We shook hands and he kissed me on the cheek and we departed. I went home, walking slowly. I was so sad and I felt like crying. At that time I didn't know that I would never see him again. Bronek, with his family, the same day left Cracow. Not only his family ran away to the Russian occupied part of Polish territory, but hundreds or maybe thousands of Jews did the same and tried to get from the Polish territory into the Russian held areas. Also my family had a plan to run away. We even hired a wagon with a horse, but, at the last, minute my family changed their mind and we stayed in Cracow. This kind of undertaking was not so simple and not so safe. There were many casualties while escaping to the Russian areas, travelers on the road were bombed, and there were many unexploded bombs on the roads, making driving very dangerous. Many were also caught while crossing the borders. But many others succeeded in crossing the borders.

My life and the life of all Jewish children of school age was filled with boredom and emptiness. After a short period of being open, the schools were closed. There was nothing to do. Some tried to take private lessons to continue schooling, but poor children could not afford this luxury and tried to find something to do or walked the streets with friends. Even walking the streets was not safe, especially for religious, bearded, Jews, who were often the target of vicious German soldiers.

One day I was walking in the street and I noticed a crowd of people standing and heartily laughing. I was wondering what is going on that people were having so much fun. Though I always was afraid of crowds, curiosity got hold of me. I approached the crowd and looked around. The picture that I saw was shocking. There was an old orthodox Jew, crying, tears flowing down his pale face, fear in his eyes and trembling hands. A young German soldier was cutting the hair of his beard, rather pulling out his hair. The Poles gathered, laughed, and enjoyed themselves. How disgusting and shameful was this view of Poles taking pleasure in the suffering of an old, helpless Jew. I felt so miserable, furious, and powerless. How disappointed I was when among the laughing Poles I noticed the superintendent of the house where we lived. How could he behave in this way? A man who got so many favors from Jewish tenants. Every holiday he got many gifts and money from them. He pretended to be so friendly, but obviously he disliked Jews, since he enjoyed seeing how this poor, old man was tortured. This experience taught me that one should not trust anyone without reservation. It was also my first lesson of the dark side human nature. What the German did to the old man was not surprising because every day they committed brutal acts. But I was disappointed and saddened by the behavior of Poles, who were our neighbors, with whom we were friends and who had the same enemy as we - the Germans.

Shortly after this bad experience, I lived through a dreadful event. Unexpectedly, one day the Germans closed the streets where Jews lived. An order was announced that no one could leave the house. Anyone disobeying this order would be killed. Understandably, we were scared to death. Not knowing what was going on and not knowing what will happen to us. The Germans went from one apartment to another to inspect. They confiscated valuable things -

gold, silver, money and furs. They were especially looking for radios. It was punishable to have a radio. Not many people had radios, but we had a radio. We hid it and were worried that Germans might find it. Tensely, we waited for the Germans to come. And when they came to our apartment it was two tall Germans with stern, unfriendly faces. We stood frightened and motionless. I looked at my poor mother, her pale face and my heart was aching. They went from one room to the next. They opened closets, drawers, searching through clothes and grabbing everything they liked. Luckily they did not find the radio. They did not say any word when they came and they did not say any word when they left. It was as if we did not exist at all. They left but we were still trembling from fear and it took a long while to recover from the shock of this invasion. We were lucky because other Jews were abused, several Jews were even killed during this action.

I lost my mother. Her death came suddenly, her heart gave in. I could not believe it. It was as if I were living in a bad dream from which I would awaken. But this was not a dream, this was real. The pain was so great, almost unbearable. My depression was also great. I could not sleep nor eat. I remember sitting at the river Vistula, which was close to our house, oblivious to the surroundings, I was lost in my sorrow. The tears were flowing down my face. I did not notice that someone was approaching. When I heard a voice, I lifted my head and I saw an old man standing in front of me. He had deep eyes. 'Why are you crying child?' he asked me. I instinctively trusted him. I opened my heart to him. I told him about my pain, about my loss. He was listening without interrupting me. When I finished, he said: "cry my child, don't be ashamed of your tears. Remember, that only time will heal your pain. Be strong my child and God bless you." He touched my head and left. He was right only time could cease my pain.

Life for the Jews under German occupation was miserable, marked with various restrictions, brutal treatment, and sporadic acts of violence. Beatings of Jews, cutting the beards of religious Jews, was a daily game for young German soldiers. Catching Jews for forced labor or killing Jews at random was ongoing and took place on the streets of our city making Jews uneasy while walking. Nobody could predict what could happen to them. Despite the cruel and harsh circumstances, Jews carried out their daily life in a normal way concerned with small trivial matters. They worked, ate, slept, married and died from natural causes and yes, even children were born. To stay alive and sane one had to be strong and resist the aim of the enemy to break us physically and mentally. Our behavior was the expression of our inner strength and strong will to survive. Through this we were able to function as normal people.

Systematically, day by day, the German authority in Cracow carried out new restrictions to make the life of the Jews more difficult. Jews were removed from nice apartments and Germans moved in. Properties and valuables were confiscated. The Jews were thrown out from their businesses and Ukrainians or Germans began operating them. The Jews were forced to bring all their valuables to the proper assigned places. Hiding valuables was forbidden and punished by death. People fully realized how serious and dangerous it would be not to obey the German orders. The majority of Jews gave in and obeyed the orders issued by the German administration. They did not want to take a rather a risky chance to hide the valuables. One could see long lines of Jews waiting to deliver their valuable possessions to the authorities. There were some who did not obey the order and hid their valuables. There are always some individuals, who have the courage to fight back, though they realize how risky it may be.

There were young boys and girls who joined underground groups which were engaged in sabotage. How brave they were.

Life was going on. People tried to lead a normal life, despite their hardships and their uncertain future. Did they have any other choice? In order to survive, one had to endure deprivation and degradation. Jews prayed to God and hoped that by some miracle they would be saved. People made attempts to do everything in order to escape the depressing reality, pushing away pessimistic thoughts. It was not easy but it was the only way to prevent breaking down.

The children also ignored the harsh conditions to which they were exposed in their young lives. Even the youngest children, who could not understand what was going on, sensed that something was not right. The children, like the adults, tried to deal with the existing situation, but in their own way. They lived in a world of fantasy and dreams, where everything has a good ending. At the same time, unconsciously they matured very fast.

It was true, that after closing the schools, we were bored and we lost ground academically, but it did not take long to get used to staying home and finding something to do. Of course there were children who were glad not to go to school because they did not like school. We were meeting friends, we were playing games, reading books, walking, we even went to the park, although it was not completely safe. Yes, we laughed, because it made us feel better. Some friends had to help their parents in their households, without regard to their young age, because Jews could not employ any Polish servants. Peasants were very poor and young

girls from villages were happy to have a job in a Jewish home, where they were treated well and had an easier life than if they were working in the fields. I had older siblings, so I did not have to do anything at home and I was free all day to do whatever I wanted.

For a while life was quiet and there were not any more changes for the worse. The Germans let the people get used to this state of existence before introducing new restrictions. This was the method they applied to give the Jews a false impression that things would not be so terrible after all.

The Jews were attending to their daily affairs and were busy with their daily routines.

When watching people walking on the street, one could recognize right away who was Jewish, because, on their arms they wore bands emblazoned with the Star Of David. Jews were wearing these Star of David bands to distinguish them from the rest of the Polish population. Now the Germans could easily spot a Jew on the street and avoid making any mistakes. When looking for Jews to abuse, the armbands gave the Germans a way to recognize them. Without the bands, the Germans could not distinguish who was Jewish from who was Polish, to them they all looked alike. By introducing the armbands, the Jews were exposed to an even a greater danger while they walked the streets trying to live day to day.

Bands were made from plastic or fabric. Some were more expensive, some were cheap. Some were fancy, some were simple. They also had different shapes. Making bands was a big business, because the demand was great and the item a necessity.

CHAPTER 6

This quiet period in the life of the Jews of Cracow did not last very long. Soon new changes took place. The Germans were masters at planning the annihilation of the Jews. It went systematically, step by step. They were not in a hurry and they knew exactly what methods to use to succeed in their goals. They had extensive knowledge of human nature, possibly they employed psychologists who gave them advice on how to fool the people and disguise their true goal of the complete elimination of the Jewish nation. They tried to convince the Jews that by obeying their orders, they did not have anything to fear. They did not implement radical measures right away, but with premeditation they gradually enforced and enhanced the rules. It was not enough that the Jews had to wear the Star of David bands on their arms, they now decided to put Jews in ghettos to separate them completely from Poles. They set up a ghetto in Podgorze, which was a section of Cracow located on one side of Vistula river. (Wisla). Because the ghetto in Podgorze was too small to settle all the Jews living in Cracow, only those Jews who got special permission were allowed to stay in ghetto. The remainder had to leave the city. My family was among those who had to leave Cracow. We got a letter from the authorities that permission to stay in Cracow was denied and we had to depart. We were upset, not knowing at this time that this was a blessing for us. Staying at Podgorze would have meant death for all of us, but in leaving Cracow we obtained a small chance to survive. We decided to go to Debica, a small town where my uncle and his family resided.

My best friend Sydia also left Cracow with her family. She had a brother and a sister. They went to a small town in the vicinity of Cracow. This was a very sad departure. We hugged each other, kissed, and, with tears in our eyes, said goodbye. We promised to stay in touch, to write to each other letters. How could I know at that moment that I was seeing my dear friend for the last time in my life. My other very close friend, Franka, left for Kielce where her sister lived. I never saw her again either. Some of my other friends went to live in the ghetto.

Not being able to remain in Cracow and to move to the Podgorze ghetto, my family prepared to go to Debica. Soon my sisters and one of my brothers left for Debica. Most of our belongings were left behind in our apartment, they took a few pieces of furniture, some clothes, and our personal belongings. They traveled in a wagon pulled by horses, moving at night and avoiding the main roads, hoping not to be stopped by Germans. It was dangerous to be caught by Germans out on the open roads. Thank God they arrived safely in Debica. My uncle had been informed earlier of our decision to live in Debica so he had rented us an apartment in a little house owned by a tailor. I was afraid to travel with them in the wagon, so I stayed longer in Cracow, knowing that my brother Leo was staying because he had a girl friend and wanted to be with her. I was sure that he would take care of me. But my brother disappeared. I was looking and looking for him but I could not find him. I was left by myself, without any money. I was so lost that I did not know what to do. I was hungry, it was getting dark and I had no place to sleep. I went to several homes but no one asked me to stay with them. Tired and hungry I went to the house of a distant relative. She was so friendly. She let me sleep in her house and she fed me. They were very nice people, and very poor, but they shared their scarce food with me. After several days of looking for my brother, I finally met him walking on the street. I was

mad crying and said that I want to go to Debica right away. My brother bought me some food, because I was still very hungry. Since he had decided to prolong his stay in Cracow for several days, he began to look for some Pole to take me to Debica and to my family. Finally he found a young Pole, whose name was Kazik, who agreed to take me by train to Debica. I took the Star of David band off my arm. Accompanied by Kazik, I boarded the train. It was a very dangerous trip for a Jewish girl. I was small, blond, with green eyes and regular features, and I looked like a Polish girl. But even though my appearance was not so bad, my heart was pounding fast when the conductor asked us to show our tickets. The conductor looked closely at my face to make sure that I was not Jewish. This was a very frightening moment and I felt relieved when he left. Many times when the conductors recognized traveling Jews they called Germans guards. It was a very risky undertaking for escaping Jews to travel by trains. I was lucky- and reached Debica without incident. I was so happy to be with my family again.

I had had a bad experience staying longer in Cracow and a very scary trip by train. Kazik was a nice young man, my family thanked him for bringing me safely to them. And of course, paid him for his trouble and for endangering himself. He did us a great favor.

My brother stayed longer in Cracow but after a while joined us, though his girl friend tried to keep him in Cracow. He made the right decision to come to us.

CHAPTER 7

Our apartment in Debica was very small. It was in the attic, and consisted of one small room and an even smaller kitchen, in which lived a young woman with a little child. She was the daughter-in-law of the owner of the house. In the room where we lived there was a couch, a bed, a table, a closet, a stove, and a cabinet. We cooked in the same room, we ate in the same room, we slept in the same room and we washed ourselves in the same room. We managed to do all these things in that one room. We did not complain and we were happy to have this small space for ourselves. The inconveniences did not matter to us. It was important to us that we had a place to live and we were all together.

At the top of the stairs leading to our apartment one had to lift a wooden plate which covered the entrance to the attic. In the attic there was a door which led to our apartment. The owner of the house was a widower with unmarried two daughters, and a son, who was married and had a small daughter. Our landlord was a tailor by profession, a very pious, religious man. This was a very poor, honest, decent family. The families, lived in harmony. We never heard any disagreements between them. The children had great respect for the 'old father. And the daughter-in-law was a quiet, nice woman who got along well with her sisters-in-law. They lived in one little apartment, which was clean. They were an ideal example of a religious and traditional Jewish family, which conducted themselves decently and although they were poor, when they went out they were dressed cleanly and neatly, so nobody could guess how poor they were. There were many, many people like them in small Polish towns, poor but leading a decent life. They raised their children to have respect for their elders, to be honest and to work hard. The Jews were so poor that they could only afford to buy meat for the Sabbath, and had no money to marry off their daughters.

I started a new life in this small town. Of course, I missed the big city with its noise, lights in the streets, big stores, movies, newspapers. Most of all I missed my friends. It was quiet in this town. There were small houses, neatly painted and kept very clean inside. Some houses had gardens with flowers. There were not too many trees in the center of the town. Within a short distance of the town's center, the picture changed. In the suburbs there were nicer houses with beautiful gardens and many trees and bushes. During the day, the streets were almost desolate. One could see, from time to time, people passing or children running and playing. The children did not have the beautiful toys and picture books which children have today. It was a simple life. There were no buses, no cars, and no trolley cars. There were small shops with food, clothes, a drugstore, a grocer etc. One could wonder how the Jews in this small town supported themselves, and how they made a living. There were no factories where people could find work. Most people were poor, only a few were better off. And I wondered how people could live in such primitive surroundings. I understood that being under German occupation, life was very difficult, but, before the war, poverty and unemployment was still great. I wondered how young people could live in such a small town not having a theater, museum and all other things which a big city offered- and which I was accustomed.

But this was not their concern. There were bigger issues. There were no jobs for them, nor opportunities. They did not have the means to go to high schools or colleges.

Staying longer in the town, I realized one could get used to life in a small town. After a short time, I got adjusted to this new place and I found that there were things which

compensated for the missing big city comforts. Fresh air, tranquillity and quiet. One could admire the beauty of nature, the sky was so blue, and in summertime the smell of the flowers was intoxicating. I enjoyed long walks with friends, exploring my new surroundings. I met new friends and most of the time I was outside, when the weather was nice. Zen became my best friend. He was a nice, good looking boy with innocent blue eyes. His father died, and his mother was killed by the Germans. He had one younger brother. Zen used to come to us almost every day. He was lonely, but he was a brave boy who faced hardships with a smile on his face. He was an orphan, and did not have anyone to care about him. He matured very fast. He did not have anyone to protect him, so he made his own decisions. He supported himself and he survived. If I compare the young people of today to this young boy I realize how different they are.

His widowed mother had settled in a small town not far from Debica with her two sons. One day, the Germans gathered all the Jews from the villages and little towns. They killed many of them on the spot. His mother was murdered then. The remaining Jews were brought to Debica. They were located in primitive wooden barracks built on an empty lot, not very far from our house. The conditions of life in these barracks were miserable. No hot water, no toilets, many people crowded in small rooms. The Germans knew that they would not be staying there for long. Their fate was sealed, but of course they did not know it. Being alive, they hoped that they would stay alive. Zen lived in this barracks with his brother. He was a young kid, but, although he was only a child, he worked on the railroad. The Germans put the youngest children to work. There was no consideration of youth or child labor laws then.

I had another friend Cesia, who was also from Cracow. She lived with her father, stepmother and stepbrother. Her stepbrother, Milek, was a very quiet shy teenager. Cesia was not as pretty as my friend Sydia, but she was good as an angel. Her sweet smile, her innocent eyes, made her face look almost pretty. Her relations with her stepmother were cordial and harmonious, as were those with her stepbrother. She was very bright, very intelligent, and her dream was to become a doctor and cure people. Her father had a little store in Debica, and her stepmother helped him in the store. Cesia helped her in the household. She never complained and always had a smile on her face. I had other friends, but Cesia and Zen were the closest and dearest ones. We met every day, we talked and walked and shared our feelings. We did not study, we did not read - because we did not have any books or newspapers. There was no library.

All the news we got was from rumors and from people who worked outside the Jewish neighborhood. At this time, there was not yet a ghetto in this area.

Chapter8

During the first year life in Debica was uneventful. It was quiet compared to the life we had left. Our town was spared all the troubles that existed in other places. People worked, children played, schools were closed but children who could afford it hired private teachers to instruct them. People tried to occupy themselves with daily chores and forget about their situation and the uncertainty of the future. Of course, there were all kinds of rumors spreading around, frightening rumors, which created tension, fear and skepticism.

We heard often about deportations taking place in other towns, cities, and villages. These rumors were scary. The question was: How could Debica be an exception? How could it not share the fate of other cities and towns? Reason gave us the answer. There was no chance that our town would be more fortunate than other cities, towns and villages. It was only a matter of time. But the people pushed away this logical conclusion. It seemed that they wanted to lull themselves, they didn't want to accept the rational truth, they preferred to deceive themselves, hoping that Debica, and they, would somehow escape this fate.

A pessimistic philosopher once said that hope is the mother of fools. Is this correct? One can interpret this in different ways. "Judenrat", a council made up of Jewish leaders was chosen to work with the German authorities in order to organize matters of the Jewish community. Most of the time, they were busy implementing all the regulations and restrictions formulated by the German administration. They were not able to help or to ease the hardship placed on the Jewish community. Occasionally the Judenrat succeeded in bribing a German official into helping a Jew in trouble. But that was achievable only in less severe cases. In general, the Judenrat was helpless, watching in despair as the German bureaucrats carried out all their orders with precision and efficiency. In very rare instances, a befriended German would tell them about an upcoming "action" – perhaps surrounding the ghetto, killing some Jews, mostly old people and children, but also younger people, and then deporting the rest to an unknown destination. At this time, people did not know that the final destination of these deported Jews was the concentration camps.

Jewish leaders were helpless and had a terrible task in carrying out German commands. But they had to obey the orders given by the Germans, otherwise they would be killed. Some leaders were foolish enough to believe that by cooperation and servitude they were helping the Jewish community. How wrong they were became clearer over time. In a small town, such as Debica, it was easier to come in contact with low ranking German officials in the secret police. (The Gestapo) Through this personal contact and extensive bribery, they managed to receive some information concerning planned actions. This type of information saved many Jewish lives.

One of the responsibilities put on the Judenrat was to deliver a specified number of women and men each day, to do manual labor such as cleaning the streets, working on the farms, cleaning the houses of German officials, etc. A lot of Germans moved into the town and displaced people from their homes and occupied them. They were provided with Jewish slaves to clean up after them. In the winter there were other jobs for Jews. Polish winters are severe, with a lot of snow, so the town needed people to clean the roads to make driving easier for the Germans. The Germans “employed “the Jews to do this job. They had a free slave labor force. Every family had to send one person to shovel the snow off the roads. My sister Eda went to shovel the snow every day. It was a strenuous job, to shovel snow for many hours. The winter was harsh, with cold penetrating winds. She used to come home completely exhausted, her legs and hands frozen, and her whole body aching not only from the hard work but from abuse of the German guards. Once a German soldier told the group in which my sister was working that, after they finished the work, every one would be killed. One can only imagine how frightened my sister and the other workers were not knowing if he wanted only to scare them or if he meant it. They were relieved when, at the end of their work, they were allowed to return home.

The Judenrat was also taxed. More and more money was demanded from the Jewish community. The Judenrat collected money and jewelry to deliver to the German officials. Most people in the town were very poor so the burden was put on the few rich ones. In times of emergency the Judenrat did collect money in great hurry to ransom jailed Jews. This was a matter of life and death. The Judenrat had its hands full dealing with all problems which befell the Jewish community. Many times the Germans came into the Jewish quarter to hunt down Jews, young and old, and send them to work in different places. Some people managed to escape and hide, because one could not predict what the Germans might do to them.

There was in town a "Soldatenhouse" - in translation a soldier's house. It was designated only for German soldiers, German police and German officials. It was a combination restaurant- restaurant- coffeehouse- cabaret; a place where the Germans came to eat, to drink alcohol, to dance and to socialize. This was a gathering place for the German secret police, the Gestapo, along with high ranking German officials. It was a place where they could share news from the front and be entertained by showgirls.

The Soldatenheim was managed by nuns and Elsa was the head nun, a supervisor responsible for the overall operation of this establishment. An officer from the Wehrmacht was the financial administrator. His name was Walter, a decent man who did not belong to the Nazi party. Polish workers did all the manual work. Poles worked in the kitchen, Poles were cooks, Poles cleaned the premises, Poles worked in construction and Poles were the waiters. Mostly women worked in the restaurant. There was a young Polish boy whose name was Mietek. He belonged to the Hitler Jugend organization (the German Youth organization). Mietek,, claimed

that he was of German origin. At the same time, he belonged to the Polish underground. At that time nobody knew that he was a traitor who delivered the names of underground members to the Germans. He also used to go into the forests to track down Jews in hiding and deliver them to the Germans. After the war, he was tried by the Polish underground and killed as a traitor.

The Judenrat used to send Jews to work in Soldatenheim. They didn't work in the kitchen, only in the flower and vegetable gardens. They chopped wood, carried packages, etc. Every day different people were sent to work for several hours. One day my brother Leo was sent with a group of other Jews to Soldatenheim. Walter took a liking to my brother and chose him from the entire group for a steady job in Soldatenheim. My brother was a young boy, handsome and very handy. He was a very good worker. He was good with tools and could do almost anything. It was very important that he also spoke German. He was treated very well by the nuns, especially by Elsa, who was a good-hearted person and not a Nazi sympathizer. Understandably, the Polish workers were jealous of him, and could not understand that the Germans respected my brother, a Jew, more than them. They respected him because he was an intelligent boy, who spoke German, which was the language taught in our Gymnasium (high school). The village women were not educated. For Leo this was a very good job, because he worked in one place while others were sent each day to different place. He also had food. And he was able to bring home bread, meat, and honey (this was an artificial kind of honey, which the Germans ate in place of butter). It was a great help to us, considering that our income was almost non-existent. My older brother was teaching small children who could not go to school. As I mentioned before, all the schools for Jewish children were closed. Teaching at home was illegal and severely punishable. We had a small income, because the parents of the children

paid, but not too much, because most of the people were poor. The children were so eager to learn. Nice, good children who matured too fast, and understood the problems that their parents faced. My brother did not have books so he thought from memory. I picture them all in my memory. Though I don't remember their names, I do remember their dark looks, so beautiful but with such sadness in their eyes, which remained even when they laughed. Poor, beautiful kids who did not know that their life would be so short and would end so tragically. Later, my brother Leo was able to get work for my two sisters in Soldatenheim. He asked the supervisor Elsa about hiring my sisters and she agreed. One of my sisters, Eda, worked in the kitchen, and the other, Anna, worked in the gardens. They were also treated well. They worked only for a short period of time. My brother worked there almost to the end of the existence of the ghetto in Debica.

It was unusual that a Jew worked in such an establishment, a place the highest-ranking German officials frequently used for wild parties with heavy drinking, congratulating each other after a “good job” was done on town’s Jews. During the ‘actions’ in small towns and villages in the vicinity of Debica, dancing and drinking with prostitutes went on almost all night. One could only wonder what was going on in their minds,- only miles away and only hours ago they had been shooting small children and old people.

Chapter 9

For a while Debica did not experience any transport. However, beneath the surface, ominous currents were running. The Germans slowly but surely carried out their satanic objectives to erase Jews from the face of the planet. Terrible news came from different places, which chilled the blood in our veins. Jews in small towns and villages were gathered in one place while the sick, the old and the children were killed on the spot. They did not bother to evacuate them. The remaining able bodies were transported to an unknown location. Packed in wagons, like cattle, without food or water, they suffered intensely in these inhuman conditions. Nobody knew what happened to them. There were more and more transports of Jews. The Germans tried to conceal the truth of where they took them. They spread fake rumors that these Jews were re-settled, and that they had built houses for them and that they were working. Many times Germans approached Jews and started friendly conversations. During these conversations they said they just visited such a place for the Jews. They said that families were kept together, that they live in good conditions and seemed to be satisfied. They also mentioned that there were doctors who took care of them. They assured them that this arrangement was only temporary, for security reasons. After the war the people would be allowed to return to their homes. What kind of fool could believe this?

Meanwhile, more and more towns and cities were Juden frei, which meant 'clean of Jews'. I remember the names of the first towns to be left without any Jews – Myslenice, Sedziszow, Ropczyne etc.

It was a sad day for the Jews in Debica when we saw the Jews of Lodz marching through our streets. How heartbreaking was this view of poor Jews, who were taken to a so-

called transit camp in Pustkow. This camp was located in the vicinity of Debica. It was a pitiful picture of wretched human beings, with ragged faces, skinny, bent figures, shabby clothes. It was a picture of human misery, a picture of human degradation. One could see fear and despair in their eyes. Even young people looked old and withdrawn. It was painful to look at them, and not be unable to help them. We couldn't even give them anything to eat or drink. When I came home I cried and cried and could not stop. I thought to myself, "will this be our fate?" I could not sleep that night. I tossed from one side to another and when, finally, I fell asleep, I had nightmares.

Pustkow was a temporary camp where Jews were brought from small towns, villages and cities for a short time. My brother's friend, Leos, worked in this place as a medical assistant. He was not sent to Pustkow, but voluntarily applied for this job. He thought that this would save him from being sent to a camp. He calculated that he would be more secure and have a better job. He did not realize that this was not a working camp, but some kind of concentration camp. When he used to come home, and when he had a day off, he told us about the inhuman conditions in this camp. Jews were shot on the spot for the smallest things, there was no serious medical care, people were only treated for small medical problems. People that were sick were killed, because the guards did not want to be bothered with ill people. The Jews worked hard, but they did not get enough food. They did not keep Jews here for very long, they sent them to bigger concentration camps, which had specialized methods of mass murder, such as Oswiecim, Treblinka, etc. Only the strong young people survived Pustkow. When one group left, another group arrived. After a time Pustkow was liquidated and my brother's friend was sent to Oswiecim.

It was only a matter of time before our town would share the fate of the others. The signs were ominous, the Jews in the town were worried, but tried to push away the sad predictions. Days passed, weeks passed, when a disastrous event took place. One of the Jewish leaders was told by a sympathetic German (maybe he was bribed) that the next day there be 'an action' in our town. This terrible news spread fast. As usual some people believed, and some did not. Often there were rumors which turned out to be false. But this time this was not the case. Even those people who believed in the bad news knew that there was no place to hide, no place to run away, considering the animosity of Polish population, who many times helped the Germans in their job by catching or denouncing Jews. My family believed in the rumors and decided to hide in Soldatenheim, in the place where my brother worked. All of us could not leave the ghetto at the same time. This was an ingenious plan, but some risk was involved. First I went out with my older brother Sam. We took off our Star of David arm bands so as not to be recognized by the Poles as Jews. We walked until we reached Soldatenheim. Luckily no one on the streets stopped us. Gentiles in this town did not know us because we were from Cracow. When we came to the Soldatenheim we went to the back of the garden and went inside through an opening in the gates. My brother Leo was waiting in the garden. First he led Sam to a cellar where he hid him. After this he returned to take me to the same hiding place. At this moment unexpectedly Walter, the German administrator, appeared from nowhere and noticed me standing there. My brother had no choice but to introduce me to him. He said, "it is my youngest sister". To our relief he did not ask what I was doing there. It was hard to know if he suspected that I was going to hide myself there. When he left, my brother took me to the cellar. This cellar was never used and no one ever went there, so it was a safe place to hide. Inside it

was dark, damp, and cold. It was also smelly. But we were happy to be there. We were impatiently waiting for our two sisters to join us. We were waiting and waiting and they did not arrive. We started to worry about what had happened. Finally, after some hours of harrowing and torturous thoughts, they arrived. Their leaving the ghetto was not simple; it was more complicated than ours and could have had a fatal ending. Shortly after our departure, the ghetto was surrounded by the Germans and no one was able to escape. My poor sisters were stuck inside and from the safety of their hiding plan witnessed the tragic events. All the town's Jews were assembled in one place, along with many other Jews who were brought from other towns and villages in the vicinity. There was a tumult, confusion, people screaming, crying. People were chased out from their houses, loud announcements from the installed megaphones ordered people to leave their houses under the threat of death. My sisters took a very courageous step in escaping to a store, which was attached to a Polish store outside the surrounded Jewish section of city. The Germans did not know that there was an exit to the gentile side. The owner of this store did not notice them entering the store. Once in the store, they mingled with other customers. They were elegantly dressed and, because they were new in town, nobody recognized them as Jewish. They went out of the store and walked to the Soldatenheim. Because they had worked there for some time, they knew the way and the Soldatenheim was only a short distance from our house. The fear of being recognized by a passerby as an escaping Jew (everyone in the town knew that the Jewish section was besieged by the Germans) made this short trip feel as if it lasted forever. When I left the ghetto the situation was different, as the ghetto was not, at the time, besieged by the Germans and the Gentiles did not know that it soon would be. Finally, they came to the Soldatenheim, frightened but safe. But now a new difficulty arose. My brother could not take them right away to our hiding place. Polish workers were

around and this could be very dangerous, since they knew my sisters. My brother hid them in a storage room where they stayed for several hours. It was a small room stuffed with brooms, brushes and all kind of cleaning stuff. They had to stand all the time, since there was no space to sit down. They gladly suffered the inconvenience because they were glad to not be in the ghetto. After their arrival, my brother came to us to tell us the good news. One could only imagine how happy we were hearing this good news. When it was getting dark and no one was around, my brother took them to the cellar. We were so glad they were here with us in this dark and stuffy place with a little window. We sat on the cold, damp ground, too scared to utter a word. Someone might hear a noise and be suspicious about what caused it. In the middle of the night, we were awakened from our nightmares by the sounds of the German language. We wondered what it could be; we looked through the small window and the picture that we saw was so frightening, that our hearts started to beat so fast we wanted to jump out from our bodies. A group of Germans were approaching our hiding place. Our first thought was that someone had seen us and denounced us to the Germans and now they are coming to get us, to kill us, or in the best case to take us away to the ghetto. With every passing moment our despair grew we were sure this was the end of our struggle to survive. Their footsteps were getting closer and closer. They stopped right in front of the cellar.

Observing their behavior we realized that we had made a mistake. They did not come to get us as we imagined. They took their rifles from their shoulders and they stacked them neatly on lawn in the front of our hiding place. They were very noisy, loudly talking and laughing, and they went inside the Soldatenheim. We breathed easier but it took us a while to calm down after this frightening experience.

It turned out the Germans had come to enjoy themselves. All night they partied with women. One could hear loud voices, laughing, dancing and singing. Presumably heavy drinking was going on. It was a strange, farcical and ridiculous situation while at the same time a macabre one. Picture this upstairs, German SS men having a party without knowing that below them, in the cellar, five Jews were hiding and listening to sounds of the ongoing party. One could easily imagine what would happen if they discovered existence. We did not sleep all night for two reasons, one that we were too nervous and secondly because of the loud noise. Finally their party came to an end and they came downstairs to take their rifles. They must have been very drunk because it took them longer to place the rifles on their shoulders and they did not march as briskly as when they arrived. After their departure, we felt much better. We finally fell asleep.

For three days the German Gestapo tortured the Jews in the ghetto section of Debica. All the Jews were assembled on a huge lot of land. The Germans played with the Jews, as a cat plays with a mouse, before swallowing it. German officials were seated and every Jew had to come to the table with his or her identification card. The one's who got a stamp could remain in town, those who did not were taken away for transportation to an unknown location. Jews did not know that they were headed to concentration camps. They could not take anything with them. What criteria they used when deciding who got a stamp was not easy to guess. Of course age and appearance of the person played some role. But how to explain that many times young and beautiful girls were killed on spot along with young healthy men? Maybe they did not like their looks being so handsome or wondered why Jewish girls were so beautiful. It was a type of Yom Kippur, a day of judgment with the Germans playing God- deciding who would live, and who would die. Two young girls that were very pretty approached the table and the German

official did not put a stamp on their identification cards, this meant that they could not remain in the ghetto and they would be transferred. With tears in their eyes they begged him to let them stay. One of the girls spoke German fluently, she had grown up in a town named Bielsko, where many Germans lived, and she was taught in German school. The German did not say anything; he just took out his gun and killed both of them on the spot.

Without any expression on his stony face he put his gun back into the holster and started to put stamps over I.D. cards. Every Jew had an identification card with their fingerprints on it, which they had been issued at the beginning of the German occupation. The Poles also had identification cards but they looked different. Almost all of the Jews that were brought to our ghetto from other places were immediately shipped out in wagons for transportation to the camps. Many who were old and infirm or very young were killed without regard. The Germans had no use for them and they were disposed like so much trash. Before my sisters escaped from the ghetto they witnessed some of the most horrible scenes imaginable. They saw Jews brought from other towns and small villages; Jews old and young, children, men and women, young boys, and young girls with sad faces and immense fear and horror in their eyes. All were dragged to the assembly place to join the Debica Jews, to share their fate. All of their belongings were confiscated, valuable or not. The image of old women and men forced to sit on the ground was engraved in their memory forever. It was heartbreaking to look at their wrinkled faces which held such emptiness. They did not expect that in a short time their lives would end. Why couldn't they die of natural causes surrounded by loved ones?

The remaining Jews from the other towns and villages who were lucky enough to get a stamp to stay in the ghetto were placed in wooden barracks which had been built for them. Families were separated. Some members were taken away, some were killed and some were allowed to stay. Those who stayed in the ghetto lamented and cried for those who were taken from them.

We stayed in our hiding place waiting impatiently for the end of the "action", worried about what was happening to our family and friends. During our time in the cellar we had one more dreadful experience. My brother was working as usual, performing his daily duties. It was dinner, a very busy time in Soldatenheim, and there were many Germans consuming their dinners and conversing. One of the Germans, a high ranking official, noticed my brother working. He was surprised that he was working and not in the ghetto during this time of "action". Right away this German went to the head nun, Elsa, who was the manager of this establishment, to complain. Very angry he asked, "Why is this Jew working today? He should be with other Jews in the ghetto now." He ordered her to send him there right away. Hearing these harsh words and an order which could not be disobeyed, she got very upset. Her mind was working quickly. What could she do to prevent this. She was in a dilemma. How could she oppose the orders, and how could she allow Leo, whom she liked so much, to be sent to the ghetto. She was not so naïve that she did not know what it meant to be in the ghetto during such an "action".

One could understand my brother's despair when Elsa told him about her conversation with the Gestapo official. My brother was frustrated and helpless. He didn't know what to do. In this moment he did not think about himself, as much as about us hidden in the cellar. He feverishly was thinking about trying to solve this impasse. He asked himself, "Who will feed my sisters and brother?

j Who will tell them when the "action" is over? How can they possibly leave the cellar on their own? He had no answers. Being sure that he was going to the ghetto he made a very risky decision. Had he any other choice? No.

Mietek, the young boy, who worked with my brother, liked him, though he disliked Jews. One could even describe his feelings for Jews, as hate. He took pleasure in catching hiding Jews and delivering them to the Gestapo for a reward. Of course, my brother did not know about this at that time. He only knew that he belonged to the Hitler Jugend (a German Youth organization). My brother must have been not in his right mind, telling this young boy about us hiding in the cellar and to ask him to take care of us, in case he had to go the ghetto. It was true that my brother was friendly with him but how could he trust him. He was a young Nazi. Maybe my brother, being in despair, was drinking and his mind was not functioning clearly. This is why he did not realize that he was putting us in grave danger. Meanwhile, Elsa, the head nun, worked out a plan to reverse the order given by this Gestapo official. She was determined to do everything in her power prevent my brother being sent back to the ghetto during this time of "action". She wanted to save my brother. She was a German, patriotic but not a Nazi, the same as Walter, the financial manager. She went to the commander of the Gestapo, who had a higher position than the officer who gave her the order to send my brother back. She knew the commander very well, as he often frequented in Soldateheim and she was on good terms with him. She decided to go to him and to talk with him about my brother. She took several bottles of the most expensive liquor to give him as a "present". During their conversation she mentioned my brother and nonchalantly asked if he could give his permission for my brother to continue working at the Soldateheim. She stressed that my brother was indispensable, and essential to the overall operation of Soldatenheim. She said that she did not have anybody to replace him and without him the service would be disrupted. The commander wanted to please her and he knew that could count on some favors from her in return. In the end, he agreed to her request. He knew that even if the Germans did not get Leo today, there would be another day,

for sure. Thus he could do her this favor without fear that he was betraying his Nazi ideology. Elsa was so glad that she succeeded in her plan to save my brother, she returned with a light heart to tell my brother the good news.

The news was very good and made us very happy. Now we had different worries. How could we be sure that the young “Hitler Jugend” would not denounce us to the Germans? Was this young boy reliable to keep such a secret? We were very uneasy, but our worries were put aside when a day passed and nothing happened. To the contrary, Mietek brought us food and made us feel better. He used to sing that everything was going well when he was passing the cellar during the day. Now my brother could relax and work hard to satisfy his boss.

After this tense time in hiding, the time came when we could leave the cellar. The “action” was completed and we had to return to the ghetto. With heavy hearts, not knowing what we would find there, we returned. Leaving the cellar was not completely without risk. If we were noticed by the personnel working there, by the Germans coming there, or by Poles passing the Soldatenheim, we could still be turned in. We left our hiding place one by one. My brother kept watch to make sure no one was around. We walked out without being seen. We were very alert while walking the streets without our Star of David armbands. We were lucky that nobody stopped us and safely we entered the ghetto. My brother Sam looked more Jewish than we did, so Mietek, who wore an armband with a swastika (emblem of the Nazis) proposed that he would accompany my brother to the ghetto. We liked that idea very much. Mietek escorted him safely to the gate of the ghetto. Sometimes it is hard to understand human

behavior. How can one explain Mietek's behavior towards us. His help stood in sharp contrast with his hostile actions against the Jews, exemplified by his "hunting" trips.

We returned to the ghetto. This was not the same place we had left when we went into hiding. It was like a ghost town. No people walking the streets. Stores closed. Complete stillness. The population had been decimated. Almost all of the old people had been killed or taken away. Families were separated. Almost every family lost someone. People were still in complete shock sat at home mourning their beloved ones. Sadness, despair and grief hung over the whole town like dark clouds after a storm. The storm hit the ghetto with such a devastating force - destroying lives and burning out all hope.

My close family at this time was spared. We did not suffer any loss. My uncle, aunt, and their three children (Hanka, Shmuel and David) were left. I lost my best friend Cesia, who was deported with her stepmother and father. Only her stepbrother was left. I cried when her stepbrother told me. Some members of my distant family were sent away, my grandmother's cousin, a highly religious man, a great talmudic scholar: his wife, a gentle woman: their son, a talented young boy who played the violin like a professional, though he never took music lessons. Deported also was their daughter, her husband- a handsome man, tall, blue eyed and blond- and their child.

Chapter 10

After a period of mourning, people started to come out from their homes. They had literally aged over night. They met other Jews, shared their grief, and little by little, their tears

dried out, but the pain remained. People started to go on with their lives. The instinct to survive took hold and the will to survive overcame their depression and loss. To live they had to eat, to eat they had to have money to buy food, and to have money they had to work. In order to exist, people had to begin to perform their daily routines, to go to work and maintain their households.

For a span of time, the Germans did not bother the ghetto. It was quiet and the Jews attended to their daily affairs. From time to time we received bad news about other places, and were concerned about our own uncertain future.

People were not laughing, one could see that they were troubled. As robots, they performed their daily duties. Life in the ghetto was not the same as when we arrived after leaving Cracow. People were more alive, more active and had hope then. The children made noise playing outside. Now everything was subdued. There was a gloom hanging over everything. The pain of losing relatives still lingered. Even the sky looked dim in the daylight.

At this time there was nothing extraordinary going on. This event-less existence ended when new repressions and restrictions were put on the Debica ghetto. The Germans decided to close the ghetto completely, people who still lived outside the ghetto had to leave their homes and move permanently into the ghetto. There was not too much space and people lived in crowded rooms with several families in one apartment. The ghetto was surrounded with barbed wire to prevent Jews from escaping. They installed a gate where a policeman checked all the pass cards of people leaving the ghetto for work outside the fence. They also checked all the

packages of people coming back from work. They confiscated a lot of things brought back by the workers. Some people knew how to bribe the policeman to smuggle in food. The conditions were a new level of miserable. Food was scarce and very expensive. The hygienic conditions were deplorable. There were no doctors. An epidemic of typhus broke out and there were some casualties. We tried to keep ourselves clean, though it was not easy. We were five people living in one room. This room served as our kitchen, bathroom, dining room, living room and our bedroom. The toilet was an outhouse in the garden. Hot water was heated on the stove. We burned wood to heat the room. My youngest cousin, a blond sweet boy, used to come often, bringing us pieces of chopped wood. My brother still worked in Soldatenheim and every day he managed to bring us food. He had a small bag in which he carried food for us - meat, bread and honey. Of course, the manager saw him leaving with a bag but she never said anything. She certainly knew that he was taking some food home. We were lucky to have enough to eat, we even used to sell some bread covered with honey. There was a shortage of bread so people were glad to get the bread and we were glad to get some money. We used the money to buy other products. Our financial situation got worse when my brother lost his job. My brother was the only Jew employed in such a place, where sabotage could be easily carried out. His patron, Elsa, received orders from the Gestapo that no Jew could work in Soldatenheim. She had no choice but to fire him. She was so sorry, having tears in her eyes when she said good-bye and wished him good luck good luck. She provided him with some food and a big bag of potatoes. This was a most precious gift and lasted a long time. We had no more bread, no more honey and no more meat. This was all that Elsa could do for him. His farewell with Walter, the financial administrator of Soldatenheim, was also sad. Walter even suggested that he could give my brother a gun and German soldier's uniform so he could try to cross the border on the Russian

side. This undertaking could be very risky and very difficult to accomplish. The thought was kind, but my brother did not want to abandon us. He thanked him very much for his offer. Walter knew what the Jews could expect from the Nazis, and he had wanted to help my brother to save himself.

CHAPTER 11

Each day more and more places were Juden frie, clean of Jews. We had relatives who lived in the east of Poland. My aunt sent us a package with food and inside there was a letter. She wrote us that day and night, without rest, transports carried Jews to the West. My uncle received some very bad news concerning his daughter and her family. They lived in Tarnow City. There was an "action" and husband was taken away. She went to the Germans, begging that her husband not be taken. They shot her and her little boy on the spot. That news almost killed my uncle, a gentle man, who suffered from stomach problems. This was a great tragedy for the whole family. We lost a beautiful cousin and a little, innocent child. Those were the first casualties for our immediate family. What would the fate of the remaining members of our family? This we did not know. We had a large family with uncles, aunts, cousins and other relatives living in different cities and towns. Our grandfather, Simcha, an old man, lived in Tarnow City. It was the same city where my cousin was shot and killed. A day before the "action", he died of natural causes. He was lucky. He was a great talmudic scholar and known in Jewish religious circles. Hundreds of Jews took part in his funeral. He knew that he was dying, but he was able to write a letter to us before his death. The last words of his letter were

illegible. The letter was sent to us through a relative. In this letter, he blessed us and wished for our survival. He also begged us to promise that, if we survived the war, my brothers would not marry out of our faith. He was a prophet and predicted that after the war there would be inter-faith marriages. He had an extraordinary personality. He lost his wife at a very young age but he never remarried because he loved his wife so much. He raised his four children, one of whom was my father, by himself. When he retired, he devoted his life to poor Jews. He used to take homeless men to his house and cook for them and help them in every possible way. He lived as a saint lives. He died as a saint dies avoiding a harsh death at the hands of the barbarians.

Paxtol German method was to create the illusion that they would harm anyone. They indicated that their intention was to resettle Jews and help rebuild their lives. They wanted to give people the false hope that if they had a profession or a trade they didn't have to fear and could keep working for the German cause. Many people wanted to believe and thus did not look too deeply behind these half-truths.

Life in ghetto was gloomy and morose. The mood of the people worsened each day. People listened to the rumors and asked one another if there was any good news. The news, if there was any, was as bad as it they could be. People were anxiously waiting for the war to end. This seemed far way. The Germans were winning, and the German army was strong and advancing day by day. It seemed at that time that Germany was invincible. The prospects for a quick end to the war were very slim.

CHAPTER 12

My friend Zenek lived in the barracks built for Jews from other places who remained after the “action”. When I used to go to visit him, I had an opportunity to observe the life of the people living in the barracks. Our life was a paradise in comparison to the conditions of life in the barracks. We lived in one room, but we were by ourselves and we had privacy. We had food and wood to heat our apartment with. Our room was kept clean.

The barracks were over crowded. The odor was sickening and the noise deafening. There were little cells one next to another, no privacy. The wooden walls were so thin that one could hear the conversation in the neighboring cell. It was a noisy and depressing place. The Germans knew very well that this was a temporary arrangement. Keeping people in such deplorable conditions for a long time could cause contagious diseases to break out. This was not in their best interest as any illness could also effect them.

Zenek and his younger brother lived in such a small cell. They tried their best to manage. Their mother had been transported. Zenek and I were good friends. He visited us almost every day, not wanting to stay in the barracks, any more than necessary. We talked a lot about life and wondered why this was happening to us. We also made plans for the future, though we didn't really believe that there would be a future for any of us. We talked about Krakow, about school, about our friends. Our friendship was so innocent and so beautiful.

In my life, Zenek took the place of Cesia, who had been transported. I missed her very much, and wondered what was happening to her angelic soul. She did not have had bone in her

whole body, but what horrors was she being subjected to? I was also thinking about my many friends from Krakow. I wondered what had become of them and if they were even still alive.

One day I got a surprise. A letter from Sydia, my dear friend, the green eyed, beautiful girl. She wrote in her letter that she was living in a small town with her parents and siblings. The same tragic events had occurred in their town- “actions”, “killings” and “transports” of Jews for resettlement. There was a time when she considered coming to us but could not leave her family. I was so happy that she was still alive. This was the last time I ever heard from her.

There were some young children in the ghetto. Some families went into hiding at the same time we did, so a small number of children did survive. It was painful to look at them. It was hard for us, but for children it was a truly a terrible experience to be hidden during an “action” The very young were given sleeping pills so they couldn’t cry out and alert the Germans, as they went on their house to house search for hidden Jews.

The children played games. But even when they were playing, there was a sadness over them. They did not understand the seriousness of the situation, but they felt that something was wrong, when they looked at their parents troubled faces.

Despite the grave situation, school age children still attended lessons in basic subjects taught by my brother Sam. They were eager to learn. Did they know that their fate was sealed, that they would never grow up? Did my beautiful cousin, who came every day to study with my brother know that his dreams to go to college when war was over would never be realized? How

very bright were these young boys and girls, how very intelligent were these children, with the sad dark eyes. How could someone imagine the unimaginable.

CHAPTER 13

Life in the ghetto worsened after it was sealed. We were confined to a small space. There was no more walking in the woods to escape to the beauty of the trees, the flowers, and smell of the grass. Everything was so depressing. Only the people who worked outside could leave the ghetto, but they could not walk freely where they wanted to. They could only go to work and return straight home.

Even walking in the ghetto was not completely safe. From time to time, Germans made escapades into the ghetto to catch Jews and send them to work in different places, where there was a need for slave workers. They sent them to clean the homes of German officials, or to work on farms etc. Being caught could also be dangerous because one couldn't predict what would happen. One could be sent away or just killed on the spot. There were no laws protecting Jews. Any time Germans came into the ghetto people ran away, but they did not always manage to avoid being caught. I had several unnerving experiences. My sister sent me to buy something in a store. I noticed that people were running but thought nothing of it. At first, I did not see Germans but when I noticed them it was too late to escape. A tall German approached me and told me to join a group of Jews that he caught. Suddenly the German started to run after a young man and I took advantage of this situation. Instead of joining the group, I ran into a store and the owner of the store hid me and some other people in the cellar. For an hour or

longer, I was sitting in the dark cellar trembling from fear. When the Germans left the ghetto, we got out from the cellar. When I came home, I was still very frightened. My family did not anything about what occurred in the street. They wondered why it took me so long to buy something in the store, which was not far from our apartment. This time I was lucky, but another time while I was walking on the street, I was caught and they took me with a group of Jews, mostly were very young and children, because most adults were working outside the ghetto. They took us to a military establishment and told me to wash the floors. I had never washed a floor before this and I was worried how I was going to do this job. I was thinking, if I could not do a good job they would kill me. My sister Ana, when she found out that I was caught, hurried over to the military establishment and asked permission to wash the floors in my place. They agreed, and I was glad to be free to go home.

I got an easy job sweeping the streets. In this small town there were no sanitation cars to clean streets. This was done by hired people, who with brooms and shovels, swept the streets everyday. Now the Germans delivered to the city Jewish slave workers who did the same job free of charge. Jewish youngsters were sent to clean the streets because they considered this job too easy for the adults. It was not too hard to sweep the streets, only the dust bothered me. I even enjoyed being outside the ghetto for several hours a day. I saw children playing and laughing. These children had happy faces. I saw men and women walking without Star of David armbands, who freely could shop in stores. I envied them. I was thinking why us, for what sins were we punished. But I did not find any answer. It seemed to me that the sun here was brighter than the sun in the ghetto. Was this possible that the sun got dim and gloomy inside the walls of the ghetto from all the human suffering and misery.

My supervisor was a middle aged man, with bulgy eyes, a red nose and a big round belly. He was a drunkard. This was the reason he had a red nose. He was always holding a bottle of whisky or Polish vodka while he watching us. He also made some remarks towards us from time to time. He thought that he was a very important man, because he now had slave workers to do his bidding. He obviously liked me because very often he took the brush from me and helped me. He gave me breaks so I could rest. I could not say that he was a bad man for he didn't abuse any of us. It was fun for me to observe the activity on the street. This was the main street and it was busiest compared with the side streets which were almost empty.

One day something unusual happened. I noticed a young German soldier leaving a bakery and holding a loaf of bread in his hand. This bakery was only for Germans. When the soldier approached me, I was startled and panicked. My instincts said run but my reason said you are crazy. Frozen from fear, I stood still. When he smiled and said to me, "Take this bread back to the ghetto", I visibly relaxed. He left in a rush not waiting to hear my thank-you. Maybe he was afraid that some other German would see him giving bread to a Jewish girl and label him a sympathizer. That would not only be embarrassing for him but could have more serious consequences. In a time when brutality and bestiality had an upper hand, this gesture of sympathy was most heart warming. It gave us some hope that maybe goodness would eventually overcome the evil of human degradation. My drunken boss was also surprised when he saw the German soldier giving a loaf of bread to me, a Jewish girl. It was beyond his comprehension. How could this be? He was used to seeing Jews being oppressed and being treated like a piece of dirt; not with compassion and kindness that this soldier chose to show me.

When I came home and told my family what had happened to me, they only shook their heads in disbelief. This story was talked over and over by our neighbors and each time the content changed. Even though the facts changed, the gesture of kindness was always a part of the story.

It was summer, and my sister was sent to work on a farm. Her job was to harvest potatoes from the soil. This was an exhausting job, because one had to be bent over for many hours digging at the potatoes. This farm belonged to the city and the Germans supplied the town with the slave workers to work it. There was a young boy who permanently worked there. He was blond, blue eyed, with regular features. My sister was sure that he was Polish. He took her aside one day and told her a secret. He was Jewish. He looked like a Polish boy and this helped him pretend to be Christian. He was careful not to tell this fact to a stranger, even if the stranger was Jewish. Hiding as a Christian was very dangerous. One false step could put him in a disastrous situation. Being in a group, one had to be very cautious. You had to know how to behave, what to say and most important to have good identification papers which stated that he was a Pole. No less important was having the knowledge of the Christian religion. If a male was accused of being Jewish all those credentials would not help him too much once he was physically examined and found out to be circumcised. In Poland, only Jews were circumcised. The Germans could not distinguish a Jew from a Pole by looks. The trouble was that the Poles could easily recognize who was Jewish and denounce the hiding Jew to the German authorities. The young boy, who pretended to be Christian, said to my sister that the only way to survive was to take a chance and to run away from the ghetto to hide or to go to a big city and pretend to be

Polish. How smart and mature was this young teenager who took his fate in his own hands and understood more than these grown ups. The adults were educated but living in illusion that somehow they would survive. But one has to be fair. It was not easy to escape and hide. Only a small percentage could actually try to do this and then success was not guaranteed. In the end, the majority of Jews hadn't the chance to escape. If the Polish population would be less hostile towards the Jews many more Jews could survive in forests and survive the War.

When my sister came home after work that day, she told my family about her conversation with this young Jewish boy whom she met on the farm. The words of this young boy, who was so brave, and so courageous that he took his own fate into his own hands stuck in our memory and urged us to do something. His advice was to escape, hide, and don't stay in ghetto waiting to be deported to a unknown place or killed.

CHAPTER 14

From this day on, the main subject of my family conversations was how to find a way to escape and where to hide. At this time, we had no parents; but my brothers and sisters were close and devoted to each other. My family did not trust the Germans, and had the intuition that being transported meant death. We did not know that Jews were burnt in the crematoriums, but we knew for sure that once people were sent away no news arrived back here of what had happened to them. We were trying to figure out what we could do, where to escape, and where to hide ourselves. Every member of my family had a different idea of how to carry this out. Some were

not realistic, just pure fantasy, impossible to work out. Others were very risky. One had suggested that we hide in the forest, but this was dangerous proposition. The Poles would uncover us sooner or later. We thought about also hiding in the cemetery. There was an abandoned mausoleum and we had the strange idea of hiding inside the empty vault. We even acquired false Polish identification cards and thought we could go to Warsaw, the capital of Poland, and live there as Christians. This was also very risky. Poles would recognize us as being Jewish and denounce us to the Germans to get a reward. We were talking and planning but the days were quickly passing and our time was running out. We did not agree on any concrete plan to solve our urgent problem, we just had to get out.

We knew that by all means, we had to figure a way out. We had to avoid remaining in the ghetto any longer because there were rumors spreading that in the near future the ghetto would be liquidated. It was only a matter of time. After all, this was the fate of all ghettos, Debica could not be an exception. One could say, dead people were walking the streets of Debica though they were still alive.

As I wrote before, our apartment was in an attic, and that stairs led up to it. The entrance was covered with a board which had to be lifted in order to go enter the attic. In one part of the attic our apartment was built, the second part of the attic was empty and used as a storage for unused things. Above the empty part of the attic was another attic. The entrance to this attic was well concealed. The whole ceiling of the first attic looked the same, and no one could imagine that above it there was another attic. This was the perfect hiding place. When we moved to this apartment, we did not have the slightest idea about the other attic. For a long time,

our landlord did not tell us about the hidden attic. We were very surprised, when one day our landlord told us about this great secret, this hidden hiding place. This was after the first "action" in the ghetto. This was good news, especially at a time when the possibility of a new "German action" started to look too real and very certain.

We still were in the ghetto and still making great plans. The tension and anxiety in the ghetto was immense. There was a feeling in the air that disaster was coming soon.

It did not take long for these dire predictions to become a reality. One member from the Judenrat (Jewish committee) received terrible news from a German, with whom he was friends, that the next day the Germans would surround the ghetto. Most likely, this German was paid for this information, but in either case, he was not a Nazi and he saved human lives. Presumably, this information came from a very reliable source. As usual some people believed in this, others doubted it, living in self delusion.

We were in a good position in having a place where to hide and were fortunate that our landlord told us about this. Though my family took this warning very seriously, they thought it there would be enough time to go up to the attic and hide. It was late in the evening and my family was preparing to go to sleep after a long day of unnerving talking and planning about what would happen and our uncertain future. I was begging my family to sleep overnight in the 'new' hiding place because it could happen that the ghetto could be under siege on the very next day. My family did not want to listen to my advice, because it was very inconvenient and uncomfortable to sleep in the attic. The ceiling was very low, one could not stand straight, it

was dark and there was not too much space. I pleaded again and again to sleep this night in the attic, but they still were reluctant. Their answer was that they would manage to go into the hiding place when the time came. As it turned out this mistake could have had disastrous results. Only by a slight miracle were we spared from being transported. We remained in our apartment and fell to sleep.

The next morning, I had to listen to a loud knocking at our door which awakened us from our sleep. We wondered who it might be. It was still dark outside and when we opened the door it was my friend Zen who rushed in. Short of breath, he mumbled nervously that the ghetto was surrounded by Germans. Zen's brother had a job at the railroad and he started work very early in the morning. With horror, he saw that the ghetto was totally surrounded by Germans. The whole town was asleep and this caught the people by surprise. Though the Jews knew that this would eventually happen, they did not know the exact time. If not for Zen's brother having to work so early in the morning and Zenek's arrival with this bad news, we wouldn't have had enough time to go into the hiding place. I said to Zenek, do not go away, we have a hiding place and you could hide with us. Zenek stayed. In a hurry, we started to take things up to the attic that we needed the most and those indispensable things we needed for survival. Things such as water, matches, candles, some food in case we had to stay in the attic for a long period of time. We were in a panic and we almost started a fire. It was still dark outside, so we used candles to give light to the place. Accidentally a rag caught on fire but luckily it was put out immediately. Several strangers from the street ran up to hide in our hiding place. When every one was inside, the opening was closed with a matching piece of the ceiling. It was so well concealed that it was really very difficult to notice that there was any difference in the

appearance of that piece of ceiling compared with the rest of it. Inside of the hiding place was my family, my friend Zen, several strange people who came from the street, and our landlord's daughter-in-law and her little baby daughter. The landlord along with two his daughters and son went to another hiding place. They were afraid that the child might cry, endangering them. We were sitting on the floor, cramped in this small place, almost motionless being afraid that smallest noise might alert the Germans and thus the hiding place would be uncovered and we would be shot. There was the little baby and we were all concerned that the baby might cry out and we would be caught when they went from one house to another to chase people out into the streets and look for those Jews that were in hiding. After a short time of waiting, which seemed hours to us, the Germans entered our old apartment. We were frozen with fear, being afraid even to breathe. We heard loud voices coming from our apartment, along with heavy steps, and all kind of loud noises - knocking, pounding, and thumping. Obviously, they were checking everything, looking for anything valuable.

Suddenly the baby started to cry. We were terrified and thought this was the end of our lives. The mother gave the baby a sleeping pill, being sure that the baby would sleep, but obviously the pill did not work and now the baby was not sleeping. Her crying was not stopping. If her cries did not stop, our hiding place would be easy discovered.

We were fearfully waiting for the worst to come. There were no steps of Germans leading to our hiding place. We heard steps but they were the steps of the Germans leaving our apartment. We breathed easier, but was still feeling tense and achy. We were sure that the

Germans had heard the crying of the baby but evidently they did not figure out where the crying was coming from.

This was a miracle, that spending such a long time in our apartment they did not find our hiding place. One wonders what did they do for such a long time in our tiny apartment. Many hours later when we came downstairs, we finally got the explanation. Our room was in complete disarray. What furniture there was had been broken, everything was taken apart. Evidently they were looking for money, silver, gold, jewelry, and other valuable possessions. They must have been very mad by not finding anything and this was why they broke everything to pieces.

Hours passed by and we still were in the attic. We were completely exhausted and confused. We did not know what to do next. We did not know when to leave from the hiding place. We did not know if it was safe to go out and if the Germans left the ghetto. This troubled us the most that we did not know what was happening to the ghetto and what would happen to us when we left the hiding place.

We listened attentively to the noises coming from the outside. We strained our ears to hear but there was complete silence, we did not hear the slightest noise or hear a single voice. We could not stay in hiding forever, so we decided to send one person outside to check the situation in the ghetto. It was like Noah who sent a dove from the ark to find out if the land was dry. We choose, my older brother, Sam to be the scout and obtain the information we needed. Since he was of slight statue and a good acrobat, he had to go from the hiding place through a small opening on the roof of the attic and had to climb down the side of the building to the

ground. It was still very dangerous to open our hiding place without knowing for sure what had happened in the ghetto. My brother managed safely, without any accident, to climb down. Impatiently everyone waited for his return. What was amazing, the baby stopped crying and was calm but now the adults were nervous and likely to cry from frustration and fear.

Sam did not come and we were sick with worry. We waited and waited. Our concerns grew greater and greater with the passing of time. Our imagination went wild. We thought the Germans were still in the ghetto and he was caught and killed. My younger brother, Leo, decided to go out and look for him. We did not want to let him go because we were afraid that whatever happened to Sam would happen to him too. In the end, he did not listen to us and left the same way Sam did. Now we were anxiously waiting for Leo to come back and worrying about both of them. We were so excited when they both came back. The news which they brought back was equally shocking. The Germans left but they took with them the entire remaining Jewish population of the town, except for a small number of young men and women. The men worked on the railroad and the women in the kitchen. The town became Juden Frei (without Jews). The ghetto in Debica was finally liquidated and shared the fate of the other towns and cities. The ghetto was a ghost town. In the streets there were the bodies of those Jews that were killed during the liquidation. All the Jews were taken away and transported to an unknown place. We did not know that the unknown place was a concentration camp.

CHAPTER 15

We were illegal, with no place to go. All our plans turned out to be a fiasco. The people who were with us in hiding, left. Only Zenek, my friend, remained with us. Dismayed and helpless, we did not know where to go or what to do. One thing we realized is that we couldn't stay in the ghetto. In our distress, a strange idea came into someone's head, why not try to hide for a while in the cellar in Soldatenheim (where we had hidden ourselves during the first 'action' in the ghetto). This time my brother did not work there and it would be more complicated. We figured out that we could stay there for a short time until we could work out some other arrangement. My brother knew the place well and he could go to the kitchen during the night and bring us some food. (Soldatenheim had a restaurant so there was plenty food) We thought that this was a good idea. Besides we could not stay in the attic hiding without food or water any longer. Our plan was a risky undertaking but we had no other choice if we were to carry out this plan. We decided to leave our hiding place during the night, while the town was asleep and there would only be a few people on the streets and no workers in Soldatenheim. My friend Zenek went with us. We removed the Star of David bands from our arms to get ready to leave the ghost ghetto. To leave the ghetto was extremely dangerous. Across from the ghetto was the Gestapo headquarters. The Germans used to observe the ghetto from here using binoculars. When they spotted an escaping Jew, they shot at him. We quietly slipped through the barb wire fence that surrounded the ghetto. Luckily, the Gestapo did not notice us, probably they were asleep considering the ghetto was empty and that it was also in the middle of night. We started to walk through the streets, separately, so not draw attention to a traveling group.

Our hearts were beating fast as we walked. We were very apprehensive about the people passing us on the streets. We met only a few people walking at that time of night at such a late

hour. Maybe some drunkards who left the bars and being intoxicated did not even pay any attention to us. There was no police on the streets. The town was in a deep sleep. All the people in the town were soundly asleep. It was like every night, but the Jews did not sleep anymore in ghetto, they were gone. The gentile part of the town looked the same. There wasn't any dramatic changes happening to their lives. Who cared that the ghetto was liquidated and fellow citizen were transported. They were just Jews.

It was not a long way to the Soldatenheim. For us being nervous, it seemed to be miles away. We were fortunate not to encounter any problems while making our way to Soldatenheim and we arrived there in one piece. My brother, Leo, led us one by one to the cellar, watching out if anyone was around. We hurried but it still it took some time until all of us were inside the cellar. Exhausted from the tension and fear of the dramatic events which occurred this day, we laid down in silence on the damp, cold, hard cellar floor. It was dark inside and the air was dusty. We were chilly, trembling from the cold, or from anxiety and fear. Our emotions were a combination of relief and worry. Sure, that we were glad that we were not caught by the Germans, but our future was murky and we did not know what the near future holds for us. The prognoses was not the best. We were laying in complete silence for several hours. We were in a state of numbness, not having the strength to talk. Since we had not eaten for many hours, we started to get thirsty and hungry. The lack of water especially bothered me. My mouth was so dry and I had stomach cramps. My brother thought that this was the right time to go upstairs to the kitchen and steal some food and water for us.

He could not predict that while going to the kitchen he would meet a worker from Soldatenheim. At this time of night this was so unusual. This is what unexpectedly happened to him.

A Pole who worked in Soldatenheim saw my brother. One could say that he was not playing with a full deck of cards. Of course he knew my brother, since he had previously worked there. Without any hesitation he went to the quarters of the German financial manager to denounce my brother. Walter, was my brothers former boss, who liked my brother. Walter got up to see what was going on. He assured the crazy Pole that he would take care of it. He thanked him for doing a good job and told him that he could leave.

The Polish worker left assuming that he would be rewarded by the German for catching a hiding Jew. When Walter confronted my brother he said to him, Leo run away. Walter then left, not asking my brother any questions. My brother came to us, short of breath, mumbled these ominous words, "We had to leave this place." There was no use in asking any questions. Just looking at my brother's pale face and hearing his words, it was not hard to guess that something went very wrong. We left the cellar in a great hurry.

From afar we noticed that Walter watched us as we ran away. He stood by and did not try to stop us. Once again a miracle happened. One of the many miracles that happened to us during our struggles to stay alive. We had no choice but to return to the ghetto which we left not too long ago. Again we walked the dangerous streets of Debica, even more scared than before.

Our future was unknown as we entered the ghost ghetto. Once again we crawled through the barb wire fence, but this time to return to the ghetto.

Once again, the Gestapo did not see us. This time, we saw sporadic Jews, walking as the living dead. Possibly they came out, as we did, from other hiding places. We were homeless, our apartment was destroyed during the raid. The ghetto in Debica officially ceased to exist in the year 1942. Not one Jew, except a small number of workers, were allowed to stay in the ghetto. To be caught here was punishable by death. Our situation was grave.

Bewildered and desperate. Hungry and thirsty. No place to stay. We were still alive but destined to die.

CHAPTER 16

By chance, my brother Leo met a friend in the street. He was a young man, who was one of the few left after the liquidation of the ghetto. He was working on the railroad. Almost all of the workers that were left were housed in the barracks, but he and his uncle stayed in their one

room apartment. My brother told him about our critical situation and he took pity of us and let us stay with them in their apartment, although it was illegal. He was a good hearted and brave young man. His uncle also agreed to with his decision. By doing this he endangered himself and his uncle in case the Gestapo found us.

Zen went to stay with his brother, who remained in the ghetto and also worked on the railroad. Zenek after staying several days with his brother, decided to go to Krakow where a ghetto still existed in Podgorze. Zenek looked like a Pole, so his appearance helped him in his plans. He took off Star of David armband and crawled through the barbed wire fence and took the next train to Krakow. Evidently, the conductor of the train did not recognize him as being Jewish and he made it to Krakow. He also managed to get into the ghetto in Podgorze.

We stayed my brother's friend apartment. We appreciated the goodness of his heart. My family took several trips to our old apartment and took out from the hiding place several suitcases with clothing and an album filled with pictures. We also took blankets and eiderdowns. Being in such an uncertain, bleak, and hopeless situation saving some belongings seemed completely foolish and irrational. As it turned out, this was practical and useful. It helped us to survive.

We three sisters slept in one bed, it was very uncomfortable but we were glad to even have this little space even to sleep. The worst thing was that I suffered from ulcers which covered my legs. The puss from these ulcers was draining, and I covered them with some gauze and rags. I didn't have any ointment to apply to them and the gauze stuck fast to the surface of

the ulcers. I couldn't do anything to ease my pain so, I suffered quietly. Especially during the night, the pain was excruciating and prevented me from getting any sleep.

We stayed all day in that room, we were afraid to go out. There was nothing else to do then to try and sleep. When we were not sleeping, we brooded about what to do next. We were always hungry. There was not much to eat. My brother's friend and his uncle shared with us their meager portions of food that was rationed to them on the job. Sometimes they were lucky to get some bread from their sources. One good thing was that we had enough water to drink. We were fortunate to have a place to stay but we knew that it was only temporary.

The Gestapo knew very well that some Jews were hidden during the 'action' and their aim was now to make a raid to catch the last remnants of Jews who managed to escape this fate of the other Jews. This time they would bother to transport them but they would kill them where they stood. There were rumors that the Gestapo (secret police) gave orders to dig graves to bury killed Jews. One could easily picture the prospect of our survival. We did not have any choices left. We were trapped like a fish in a net. We were trying to free ourselves but the net got tighter and tighter with the passing of time.

There was no place to escape to. All our plans which we made were not realistic. In carrying them out carry out it became a fiasco. How many hours had we spent analyzing all the possibilities. We believed that Germany would be defeated at the end, though in this time it was still victorious. The big problem was how to survive during this time of war. Where could we run to? This was an academic question for which one could not expect any answer to solve.

Outside the ghetto, danger lurked in every corner. The German police and the Polish population were our enemies. Our fate was sealed. The Germans sentenced us to death. The Gestapo watched us from their headquarters. They searched out all movements in the ghetto.

Our depression grew, and hopeless overwhelmed us. One thing was left to pray to God for some miracle. And we prayed to the God of Israel. I was thinking about death and I was so scared. I was so young and did not want to die. I cried and cried, until there were no more tears in my eyes. I remember my brother Sam who saw me despairing said to me, "Don't cry. If I could give you my life to save you, I would give it to you without any hesitation." I prayed to God, "God , please send us a righteous Pole who could save us."

Would my prayers be answered?

Someone was knocking at the door of the apartment late one evening. We were apprehensive, fearful about who could it be. Nobody used to come to visit us. Was it the Gestapo? Who else? Whoever it was, we had to open the door? My sister Eda, was the courageous one to open the door. There was no German there, but a Polish country woman. Surprised, we looked at her. We saw a young smiling face, but it was wrinkled from working in the sun.

She entered the room. We wondered how she got through the barb wire fence which surrounded the ghetto. She was so naive. She didn't know that the Germans were watching the ghetto and that they shot trespassers. The Gestapo headquarters was located directly across from

the ghetto. Why did she come? These were the questions which came to our mind. In the next minute, we had our answer. She asked us if we had something to sell? Poles used to come to the ghetto before its liquidation to buy bargains from Jews in exchange for food. Even during that time nobody would dare to come inside. The goods were exchanged through the openings in the fence. By coming into the ghetto, she risked her own life.

My brother's friend made a remark. She would do much better hiding Jews than to buy old clothes. This innocent remark, out of nowhere, decided about our future. The peasant woman did not say anything. The expression on her face showed that these words caught her by surprise and she was thinking about this remark. Finally, she said that she would talk this over with her husband and let us know the next day. Her answer was unexpected and unbelievable.

When she left the room, my sister Eda went after her. She kissed her and begged her to hide us and to save us from being killed. The peasant woman was visibly moved, seeing tears flowing from my sister's dark and beautiful eyes.

A little hope started to take root in our hearts. Maybe she was an angel sent to save us in our time of need. We were excited and could not sleep during the night. We kept thinking about if she would come and take us away. The next day we were anxiously waiting many hours for her to come. She kept her word and late in the evening she came back. We were elated when she said simply that she talked this over with her husband and that he agreed to hide you. After a moment of elation, my family became somber. How could we go to complete strangers and put our lives in their hands. My family stood before a dilemma. To go and live or to not go and

die. We did not know what kind of people they were. Could we trust them? We heard terrible stories about how Poles took Jews in to hide them and they robbed them, taking away all their valuables (money, gold, and all their belongings) and afterwards they killed them or sometimes they called the Polish police (because calling the German police might put them in danger - the Germans would brand them sympathizers and kill them and also kill/transport the Jews) to turn in their wards.

On the other hand, how could we remain in the ghetto? We were illegal and would eventually be killed. Going to strangers was risky, but it was also a chance to stay alive. Later, after taking this under consideration, all the arguments pro and against were done with, we made a decision to go. We had no choice but to escape from the ghetto.

We found an ingenious idea to test her intentions. We would give all our belongings to her today, but we would go with her the next day. If their intentions were bad and they did not want to hide us, only rob us, she would not come back to take us to their home. My family made her a proposition. Take all our belongings today and come for us the next day. She rejected the idea right away as a foolish one. There were rumors that the Gestapo would come to the ghetto soon to finish off the remaining Jews who had been in hiding during the last "action", which cleansed out the entire ghetto.

She assured us that everyone knows that graves were dug outside to bury the Jews in and she said that it made no sense for her to take our belonging without us, because when she would be able to come the next time, we would be dead. We heard her words and we liked what she

said. Her words were music to our ears. Though our suspicion diminished, we were still not one hundred percent convinced that it was safe to go with her. We decided that all of us would not go that day. Only my sister Eda with all our belongings would go. She would check out the place and to see what kind of people the farmers was and to talk with the farmer himself. My sister left with Barbara, the peasant woman, taking with her all our meager possessions.

She arrived safely to their house. The farmer greeted her very friendly and gave her something to eat. They had a very good conversation. My sister liked what she saw and the farmer made a very good impression on her. She wrote a letter to us giving us a short report about her findings. She gave the letter to farmer's wife which she delivered to us.

The next day Barbara came back. This time she brought a letter from my sister, Eda. The letter stated that the farmer was a deeply religious man, and she could not imagine that this kind of person would be able to kill someone. His eyes had a look of an honest and decent man. Her letter was so assuring and completely eased our fears. We packed up our remaining personal belongings and left the ghetto. It was not such a simple and safe undertaking.

Even though the ghetto was empty, there was still a great danger involved in such an escapade. As I mentioned before the ghetto was under Gestapo surveillance and being noticed by the Germans meant being killed on the spot. One by one, we slid through the space between the barb wire fence and the outside. The fence surrounded the ghetto on all sides. We had done this several times before (when we escaped to Soldatenheim, only to later return) so we were experienced. When we were leaving, another unexpected complication arose. Some Poles were

standing around watching us. Our hearts started to beat faster expecting the worse to come.

They could easily catch us and deliver us to the Germans, which is what sometimes happened.

This time fortune smiled on us, to meet good and honest people, who did not prevent us from escaping but in the contrary encouraged us to escape. Seeing the sympathy of these strangers was heartwarming.

We took off the Star of David armbands we wore and walked separately to the river Wisloka, where the son of the farmer, Tadek, waited with a horse drawn wagon.

The bridge over the river was demolished by allied bombing and was partially rebuilt to enable people to cross the river and reach the other side. To use this bridge one had to pay a toll.

There were two toll men standing at one end who were collecting the money from people allowing them to cross the bridge. You had to pay even more when you crossed with vehicles.

We climbed into the wagon and sat down. We were bundled up in shawls and blankets. It was late fall and the evenings were cool and breezy. We closed our eyes to pretend we were asleep so as to not attract the attention of the toll men on the bridge. The men observed closely everyone who crossed to make sure that some Jews were not escaping. Possibly they did not do this on their own but on orders from the Germans to keep watch for escaping Jews. When they recognized a Jew, they caught him and denounced him to the Gestapo. It was very dangerous to cross a bridge for escaping Jews. It is true that we were disguised as peasants and one could not see too clearly our faces which were wrapped with our shawls. We still feared that a group of only three people, (because my brother Leo did not go with us - the farmer did not want take so

many people in at one time) would look suspicious. We were very nervous of being recognized as escaping Jews. It was a bright night, the moon was full. These unfavorable conditions added to make this a more serious situation. Barbara paid the toll and luckily the toll men did not pay any attention to us. All they saw was a peasant woman with her son driving a wagon.

Again everything was going well and we crossed the bridge without any trouble. Now we could relax and open our eyes. We could breathe fresh air and look around. It was so refreshing to see nature's beauty and to fill out our lungs with fresh air. For so many, many hours and days, we were cramped in scanty, smelly places. The horses galloped faster and faster, taking us to the unknown and unpredictable future. This was much better than the predicted future in ghetto, death.

Our relaxation did not last for a long time. A peasant was walking on the road and made a sign to stop the wagon. When Tadek stopped the horses, the peasant asked for a favor to give him a ride. He did not even wait for a permission, but jumped on the wagon and sat next to the driver. There was not too much space because Barbara was sitting in the front, but he did not care and squeezed himself between Tadek and Barbara. He was a talkative man and right away he started a conversation, mostly he talked about Jews.

Evidently this was his favorite subject. He hated Jews and his hatred was expressed in his opinions about Jews. He was telling them how bad the Jews were and how the Germans should be thanked for ridding Poland of the Jews. One could easily imagine how we felt listening to him. Wrongly we assumed that maybe he recognized us and this was why he was talking in

such away about Jews. One could also imagine how poor Barbara felt listening to his litany. She was a very smart woman and did not let him see that this conversation made her uncomfortable. On the contrary, she was self-controlled and played her role marvelously. She laughed and even made jokes about Jews, being completely in agreement with his views. One could only admire her behavior being so at ease. After driving with us for several miles, the peasant got down and left not suspecting that we were Jews.

Regrettably this was not the last frightening event which accosted us during our trip to the farmer's house. We noticed a young man running and when we asked what happened he said that the Germans together with Polish police are making a raid to catch Poles for work in Germany. This was the last straw in our of our tension and stressful journey. This could have had a tragic outcome if we were stopped for documents. Good fate did not leave us this time. The police were driving in a different direction than we were.

CHAPTER 17

Late in the night we arrived safely to the village Zassow, which was located not that far from Debica. This was fall 1942. A new card in our life began. Tired and completely exhausted from our tense and frightful journey, we climbed down from the wagon. Luckily none of the neighbors saw us from because it was late and the village was fast asleep. There was a complete stillness only interrupted by the wind blowing and moving the branches of the trees.

Dragging our achy legs, we walked behind Barbara who took us to the barn where we sat down. Barbara left but came back and brought us some bread to eat and coffee to drink. We

were very hungry and this tasted like the best cake we had ever eaten. In the barn hay was stored to feed the cattle in the winter time. When we finished eating we laid down on the bales of hay. It was good that we were not allergic to the smell of hay. Sneezing could endanger our stay there. Someone passing by could hear our sneezing in the barn.

Even though we were tired from both our journey and during the previous nights when we couldn't get enough sleep, we could not fall asleep. We still were not sure about what would happen to us. We wondered if the farmers would keep us for a longer time if the war didn't end. Many questions and doubts of this kind filled our minds and wouldn't let us rest. The uncertainty of our future poisoned our minds. We escaped the imminent danger by leaving the ghetto but this was not a long range solution. Even hiding here, far away from the ghetto, could not remove, without any reservations, our fears and uncertainty. The future still looked unpredictable and cloudy.

Despite all these thoughts, flavored with pessimism and distrust, a small spark of hope began glowing warming our hearts. We finally fell asleep.

Suddenly the silence of the night was disturbed by loud noises of knocking and banging. We woke up fearful and frightened. Our hearts beat with such speed that the fear became unbearable.

Our farmer, Kazimierz, and his son, Tadek, a teenager, did not go to sleep and did not rest. All night they worked hard to prepare the hiding place for us where we could live. We could not stay in the barn, someone could see us very easily.

These sounds that were fearful now became music to our ears. It was a good sign, because building a hiding place clearly meant that their intentions were to keep us and not kill us. We thought that this may be a dream, but this was not a dream. It was real.

In midst of all this noise, we fell asleep. This time we slept but our farmer and his son did not sleep. They worked tirelessly to create our new home.

On the farm, there was a stable which housed the horses and the cows. It was two separate compartments, divided by a wall. Kazimierz, the farmer, came up with the ingenious idea of where and how to build a hiding place for us. He removed the wall which separated the horses from the cows and moved it close to one of the other walls, leaving enough space between the walls where we could be placed. He cut out a square hole on the bottom of the wall, big enough so that we could crawl through it to get into our hiding place. When we were inside he inserted the piece back into the opening of the wall. The entrance was then concealed with a heap of manure. This was a good arrangement and a good precaution if a neighbor made an unexpected visit into the stable.

Even the best concealed hiding place would not be safe in event the Gestapo came looking for hiding Jews. No place was safe from them.

In the morning, our hiding place was finished and we were ready to move in. We had to leave the barn where we spent the night and move into the stable. Again this was not simple. We had to take under consideration that though it was early morning someone could be around and see us. Peasants usually get up very early in the morning. Our farmer had to be very alert and watch if there were any neighbors or strangers outside while we walked from the barn to the stable. If anyone saw us, it would put them and us in a very dangerous situation.

Our farmers, their son Tadeusz and daughter Irena were on guard, standing at the four corners of the farm watching out if anyone was around or if someone on the road was approaching. Understandably everyone was nervous and tense. We left the barn and in a great rush we ran to the stable.

Now, one by one, we crawled into our hiding place. Inside was dark. The plaster between the boards of the wall was removed to let the air to come through the openings. The space was small but there was enough space to lie down. The odor from the manure bothered us a lot. It's a stinky smell which made us nauseous at the beginning, but later we got used to it. There was also little flies that fed on the manure flew in through the openings that were also very annoying.

CHAPTER 18

In this place we started our vegetated life. We were happy to be there, separated from the hostile world that was out to get us. We were glad to be isolated from the world where hatred, bestiality, and demonic power ruled. This dark compound and this smelly place was heaven to us. How lucky we were to successfully escape from the ominous world in which our fate of being killed was a grim reality.

Straw was spread on the bare ground and we sat or lied down. We had our basic necessities of living such as cups, plates, spoons and a knife. All these things we hung on the wall. We had a little mirror, comb, and paper and a pencil. We had a thermometer, a prayer book, and eiderdowns. These were our treasures. We also had a little kerosene lamp which we could only light during the day and only when we were eating. When it was dusk the kerosene lamp had to be turned off, because then light would be visible through the cracks in the wall and the neighbors would wonder what or who was inside the stable when all the members of the farmer's family were inside their house. This would be suspicious and right away rumors would be spread that something unusual was going on in our farmers stable. We could not talk loudly, because people passing by the stable might hear our voices and wonder who is talking inside the stable when our farmers and their children were at home. We had to be very careful not to light the kerosene lamp during the night and not to talk too loudly. We had to avoid attracting the attention of any passersby or neighbor. We whispered so softly, that it was barely audible.

There was nothing to do. Almost all day it was dark inside. We did not have any books or newspapers to read. It was too dark to even be able to read. One thing was left for us to do,

we slept. We slept almost all day and night with the exception of time we ate, peeled potatoes, or washed our face and hands. These were the only breaks during the day when we did not sleep. Looking back now, I cannot understand how we could sleep for so many hours.

My sisters were glad to have the job of peeling potatoes, which Barbara used for our meals. This task had two advantages. First it gave them some work to do and was a break in their inactivity all day along. I too enjoyed this precious short time when there was enough dim light to be able to draw. This was what my hobby was. More importantly it gave us a chance to save some water, which we used for washing our faces and hands. We were looking forward for the time when Kazimierz used to bring us a big pail filled with water and a bag with potatoes to be peeled. Kazimierz had several jobs. Every day he used to take out a bucket and to empty it, everyday he brought us the potatoes to peel and everyday he brought us our meals three times a day. Barbara was preparing and cooking our meals and baking bread.

We ate only during the day because the light from the little kerosene lamp which we lit was not visible. Our food was always the same and in small portions. Exceptions were when there was some hope that the war would end soon. If the Germans were losing, our food got better. This we used as some kind of a barometer on how the war was proceeding. When Kazimierz brought us a portion of pork and an additional meal, we knew that the news was good. Because the piece of meat was too small to divide between all of us, my family decided to give the whole portion to me.

Usually Kazimierz brought us our meals. Sometimes Barbara brought us the food instead of her husband. For breakfast we usually received potatoes with pieces of lard and black coffee sweetened with saccharin. For lunch we had beans, or cabbage and potatoes. For supper we had bread and black coffee. For a week we got a loaf of bread. We tried to ration it in such a way that it would last for the whole week. We did not eat much, but then we were not too hungry or thirsty. All we did was sit motionless and sleep a lot. Our body did not need too much energy to function. Sleeping was a blessing for us because it gave us a rest from worrying.

After a short time of blissful excitement of avoiding imminent danger some symptoms of depression showed up.

The minutes, hours, and days dragged on. For me, the adjustment to this conditions of living was really very hard. The rest of my family took this much better than I did. I was used to always being outside. I used to walk for many hours with my friends. Now being confined in this small, murky, and stuffy enclosure affected me greatly. At times I could hardly endure it. In addition, I was not allowed to talk above a whisper. In the beginning, I was able to sleep for many hours but that changed now. I was laying with my eyes closed and sleep did not come. I felt so bad that my family started to worry about me. My sister Ann, to make me feel better, thought that it would be beneficial to take me out from the hiding place for a walk. This was a very risky decision because someone could see us. It was in the middle of the night when we went out e went out from the hiding place and of course without the knowledge of our farmers. If they knew about it, they would be rightfully mad with us.

How beautiful it was to walk outside and to breathe fresh air. The sky was cloudless and the moon and the stars were shining brightly. I thought how divine it would be to stay outside forever and not return to the hiding place. My pleasure at being outside was lessened by the fear that someone could see us. We were not outside too long so not to prolong our hazardous escapade. We went back to our hiding place. This was the only time that we ventured outside. The risk was too high.

Being exposed to the outside did not improve my condition but intensified my yearning for freedom. I could not sleep at all during the day, while my family slept. I looked through the openings of the wall, straining my eyes to see the trees growing inside the garden and listening to chirping of the birds. I envied the birds which were free and could fly anywhere they wanted. I heard children playing and making noise. I asked myself a question, what did I do wrong? For what sins am I being punished for? Why could I not be outside and enjoy myself like the free people and not be cramped into this hiding place? There were many more unanswered questions.

These feelings of self pity overwhelmed me but my reason started to persuade me to stop complaining and to come to my senses. What right had I to be discontented when I should be thankful that we were able to escape from the ghetto and be rescued in the last minute. Death was imminent. It was hanging over our heads and to find shelter in the house of righteous Poles was a miracle. Slowly, my reasoning prevailed and slowly I accepted these conditions of life. It wouldn't last forever. Did I have any other choice? I just had to adjust to this new reality. I tried hard to cope with my life in the hiding place.

My family adjusted well to life in hiding, but it was not always so easy for them. It took them a long while to get rid of the poisonous thoughts that tormented them. Their worries about what would happen if Germany won the War? What could happen if the War lasted for a long time and our saviors would get tired of us and threw us out or maybe kill us. The uncertainty of the future was disturbing. Nobody could predict what kind of complications might arise or what the future would bring.

There existed in our mind contradictory feelings such as faith and disbelief, hope and despair. There was a constant conflict of opposite views. We had to be thankful to God for answering our prayers and for sending us good and honest people who kept us in hiding and fed us. They endangered their own lives and the life of their children. It was not easy for our farmers. Every time some new rumor of catching Jews in hiding places were heard, they had sleepless nights being afraid that the Germans would find us.

Our farmer Kazimierz was thinking of how to make the hiding place more secure in case someone came. He dug a tunnel which lead from our hiding place to outside, which would enable us to escape in case someone came looking for Jews in the stable. There were troubling rumors spreading that the Germans used dogs in searching for Jews.

These were only false rumors which never took place. The Germans used to search for Jews only when there was a denunciation. They needed some proof or accusation before they would come and search.

When we left the ghetto to hide ourselves in the farmers house in the village Zassow, my brother Leo remained in the ghetto to join us later. There were too many of us to take at the same time.

Barbara and Tadeusz drove again to the ghetto to pickup my brother and take him out of the ghetto. Tadeusz waited close to river Wisloka while Barbara walked to the ghetto. This time she did not dare go inside but was standing outside and looking into the ghetto.

There was no one to be seen. The ghetto was completely deserted. She did not know what to think about this. A man who passed by and seeing her standing there informed her that the ghetto was totally liquidated. There were no more Jews. Officially the vibrant Jewish community in Debica did not exist anymore.

Barbara and Tadeusz came back empty handed with very bad news for us. Hearing the sad news we were heartbroken and cried. We were out of our mind with worry not knowing what had happened to him. The only thing left for us to do was to pray to God to bring him safely back to us. With each passing day with no news from him, our hopes of seeing him again started to fade. Now all our thoughts were concentrated on him and we could not do a thing about anything. Again and again, we blamed ourselves. Why did we not all leave the ghetto together? Our despair and crying would not change what had happened to him.

One day when our hopes at ever seeing Leo again was almost at the zero point, something unexpected and incredible happened. It was a day as usual. Inside our hiding place was dark and

there was nothing to do so we were dozing. All of a sudden we heard the steps of someone approaching our hiding place. Because this was not a regular time when food was brought to us we got apprehensive and scared. We waited anxiously to see who was coming and why. It was Barbara coming. The expression on her face indicated that she brought us some news. Our hearts jumped in anticipation to hear what she had to tell us. Barbara brought us the best news. She was so excited that she said only that Leo was in her house. When she regained her composure she told us the whole story.

When Leo came into their house there was a neighbor inside. This was why they could not talk to him. Her husband Kazimierz stepped on his foot and he understood the message. When he left the room Kazimierz went after him and told him to go outside to the forest, which was located not too far away and wait there until night. When it was dark, Tadeusz would go there and pick him up and take him to our hiding place. My brother did as he was told.

One could only imagine our joy at seeing our brother alive. The news was so good that it seemed, to us, that we were dreaming. I even pinched myself to find out if I was not dreaming. This was not a dream but a true fact. Still it was like a fairy tale where unbelievable and fantastic events take place and there is always a happy ending. Barbara left and we remained as happy as one could be.

It was still light outside, but not in our hiding place. We still had to wait several hours until Tadeusz would be able to go to the forest to pickup Leo. We impatiently waited for the

darkness of night, but time was passing slowly for us. It seemed that the light did not want to be replaced by the darkness, it lingered.

Leo was not sheltered in safety yet. We were uneasy that someone could notice him in the forest and recognize that he was Jewish and denounce him to the Germans or the Polish police.

Finally darkness set over the village and now was the right time for Tadeusz to go to the forest. It was a rather small one, only a short distance from our farmers house. Tadeusz had no difficulty in spotting my brother. He was sitting on the ground between two trees. When they walked back to the house they looked around if there anyone walking on the road or if anyone was standing in front of the house. Luckily nobody saw them and they safely came. Immediately Barbara took him to our hiding place. It was an overwhelming feeling of joy in seeing him alive and together again with us. Our gratitude went to G-d who answered our prayers. It was immeasurable. We smiled and cried but they were tears of happiness.

After our excitement cooled off and we got used to the fact that he was with us, we could concentrate on his story. His experiences from time we left, and what a story he had to tell.

Shortly after we left the ghetto, the Germans made a raid to catch those Jews who managed to stay alive by hiding themselves while the liquidation of the ghetto was taking place. The Jews which they caught at this time were killed on spot and buried by Poles in graves specially prepared for this purpose.

All the 'legal' workers who were left after the liquidation were deported to an unknown place. This was the final end of all the Jews in Debica. The Jewish population had been totally rooted out. The German henchmen perfectly carried out their orders and their goal was accomplished.

Just in the nick of time, my brother with the company of two friends (who were brothers) succeeded in escaping. These friends lived in the village before the war, and their parents had a neighbor, a Polish peasant, who had befriended with them. This peasant took the friends and also took my brother. He gave them shelter and hid them in a barn. From the first moment, my brother was thinking of leaving them and joining us. He had to keep his plans to himself, because they would never allow him to leave them. They were afraid that if he was caught and tortured he would be forced to reveal their hiding place. My brother wanted to be together with us and share his fate with us. Once he decided to leave them, nothing could change his mind. He started to make plans about how to carry this out. First, he had to be very careful and not to make the smallest remark which could reveal his thoughts. Secondly, he had to choose the right time and figure out how to do and when. He saved a part of a loaf of bread which he would take with him. One night when he could not fall asleep, tossing from one side to another, with thoughts of leaving heavy on his mind, he said to himself, that tonight is the right time and he could not wait any longer. He knew that the longer he waited he would lose his courage to leave his friends. Some inner impulse urged him to go. Go! Go now! Don't delay any longer! His friends were sound asleep. He dressed quietly, avoiding making the smallest noise. He slowly opened the door without making a single sound. One of friends moved in his sleep. My brother

stiffened, afraid even to breathe, fearing that he might awaken and all his plans would be ruined. This did not occur. His friend continued to sleep. He left and started to walk very fast, almost, but not quite, running away. It seemed to him that he heard his friend screaming that he should not go away but that he should come back. In reality it was his imagination and not his friend speaking. It was true that leaving his friends was not an easy undertaking, but it was much harder to find the village of Zassow and the house of our farmers. My brother must be very bright and he evidently possessed exceptional skills of orientation because he was able to accomplish both tasks. He did not have any maps, and the road signs were hard to follow. He was familiar with the terrain and he knew the name of the village, and also the name of the peasants who hid us. He did not know the roads nor did he have any road maps to show him the direction to the village. Our village was far away from the village where he stayed with his friends. He read the road signs but there were not too many of them. He also had another problem. He had to avoid meeting any peasants walking on the roads or driving by, who might easily recognize him as being Jewish. He looked a little strange because he was unshaven and unkempt from being in hiding. He walked on the side roads, being very careful not to meet anybody. When he saw someone walking from afar, he hid himself. When he saw a child, he dared to ask for direction. Some older children could provide him with valuable information, but most of the time they did not know anything. To ask children for information was much more secure than asking adults. He knew that children would not recognize him as being a Jew and would not turn him in. This would not be the case with grownups. If he was recognized it would result in death. He walked and walked many, many hours and was tired and hungry. He stopped walking to rest his aching legs. He had the piece of bread with him, so he ate it but this small portion of bread did not satisfy his hunger. He was also very thirsty. Not too far away

there was a stream flowing. He went to the stream washed his face to freshen himself and he drank the water from stream. He rested for a while, but he could not waste too much time, he had to reach the village before nightfall.

Until now, everything was going well. He walked many, many miles, without having any unpleasant encounters. But his luck took a different turn. Unexpectedly he came face to face with two young Poles. They appeared suddenly. He did not understand how it happened, that he did not notice them, being so watchful and careful. When they saw him, they called him a dirty Jew and asked him where was he going. My brother was a strong and athletic young boy, and he was used to defending himself. Being one of the few Jewish boys attending a public high school, he often was attacked by Polish students. He had some practice in fighting. Now being confronted with two hooligans, he applied his skills. Besides the instinct of survival prompted his action and gave him extraordinary strength. Quick, without any hesitation, he kicked one in a very sensitive place and at the same time, he hit the other as hard as he could knocking him down. Not looking behind him he ran as fast as he could. He ran and ran, and when he noticed a forest, he hid himself inside. He was wet from perspiration and his heart was beating fast from running. He was lying on the moss of the forest entirely exhausted and catching his breath. He strained his ears to hear if someone was running on the road, but there was complete silence. He heard only the wind blowing rustling the branches, and the chirping of the birds.

He thought that he could reach the village Zassow before dark but it was impossible. He was still too far way. Now he changed his plans. He stayed in the forest until it was dark and walked all night. It was harder to find the roads but it was safer. After the dangerous encounter

with the young men, he had to take greater measures of precaution. The next day he arrived in a village. He was reading the name of the village and he could not believe his eyes. The name of the village was Zassow. He read the name several times to make sure that he did not make any mistake. His eyes did not fool him, it was clearly written Zassow. He could not comprehend fully how he managed to find the village where we stayed. One had to believe that an angel lead him all the way to us. This was not the end to his unbelievable story. The first house he went to was the house of our farmers. How could someone explain that he went up to this house without being afraid that the peasants inside would denounce him. He, who was so careful, took a chance to go up to a strange house. Sometimes there were things which one could not grasp and explain only by pure reason. Was not this episode one link in a chain of many events which miraculously had a happy ending. How good it was to have Leo with us and not to worry about him. He was safe with us in our hiding place and his fate would be connected with our fate. One could learn a lesson, not to worry before time and never to lose hope.

CHAPTER 19

Everything went back to normal. We had plenty of time to think now not only about ourselves but also about our relatives and friends from Debica who were deported. We wondered what had happened to them and if they were still somehow alive. And if they would be alive what kind of abuse and torture were they being exposed to. All these unanswered questions made us sad. How painful it was for my sisters, who witnessed the “action” in the ghetto. Their visual memory of the horrible scenes of young and old people along with the

children mercilessly killed, and the arrogance of those individuals, who played God, deciding who was to live and who was to die.

I was thinking about my friends from Krakow whom I left behind. I remember my best friend, Sydia and Franka, who went to stay with her sister in Kielce and many other friends. I understood clearly how fortunate I was to be together with my family in the hiding place. Though we experienced hardship and fear, we also had a chance to survive.

Time was passing. Day after day. Nothing special happened. Our farmers kept us, and did not come to us with bad news. I got used to living in these harsh conditions and accepted the fact that I was in some kind of prison, from which I could not move out. Everyday I looked forward for the time when was allowed to light the kerosene lamp. I took advantage of this and was drawing. This gave me some pleasure and relaxation. I was listening to the sounds from the outside world. I was looking through the cracks but couldn't see too much.

The fall went by and then winter came. We were prudent to take warm clothes with us along with several eiderdowns (in Poland the winters were very cold and people covered themselves with eiderdowns). When the winter came we were prepared for the cold weather. We had a lot of warm clothing to protect us from the cold and to keep us warm. We slept on many layers of straw. We were dressed in layers of winter clothes and were covered with the eiderdowns. I was drawing with gloves on. This was hard to do but I did not want to deny myself this little pleasure. One had to picture us all bundled up and sitting or lying in one place all day and night in complete darkness. There was no space to walk. Only enough space to fit

us. We could only whisper. Outside the wind was blowing and the snow was falling. This little space for ourselves was not so bad, considering our options, it was a blessing. We were neither hungry nor cold.

We survived the winter and our hopes for surviving increased. This hope gave us the strength to endure all inconveniences. I understood that the only reason why we were being persecuted was not because we were bad but because we were Jews. I pledged to myself that if I survived that I would never, never abandon my Jewish heritage, in spite of our enemies, who wanted to erase my nation from the surface of the world.

Spring arrived. The seasons changed, but not our lifestyle. On one side this was good because we were alive, but on the other hand our situation had not improved. The days were longer, but for us this did not have any meaning. In our hiding place it was always night. We heard birds singing outside, but we could not see them. The air was fresh outside and the flowers blossomed, and the sun shined brightly. We did not breathe the fresh air, only the smelly air which was inside. We did not see the shining sun, but only the dim light from the kerosene lamp during the short period of time during the day when we could have light. We could not smell the flowers. The only difference was that we didn't have to wear warm clothes and cover-up with the eiderdowns. We could move our bodies freely, and this felt good.

Three times each day we saw our farmer Kazimierz. During the winter Barbara did not pay us any visits, but with the beginning of spring, her visits were sporadic. We did not miss her when she did not come but were rather glad because any time she came to visit us she used to

bring depressing news. As they say no news is good news. We were left with ourselves and with our thoughts.

CHAPTER 20

The weather started to be warmer and the small flies began breeding on the manure. They multiplied into a very large number Of flies and penetrated through the openings in the wall. The little flies bothered us immensely while we ate our meager meals, and when we had light from the kerosene lamp. They were falling into our food and they were all over us. There was another problem which was more serious and urgent. The smell of the decomposing manure and the increased heat was too intense that it made all of us nauseous. Our saviors discussed this problem to find some solution. They understood that we couldn't stay any longer in this hiding place because we could get sick. Becoming sick would create a very dangerous situation. What could they do with sick Jews. They could not call a doctor because then they would be in trouble. It was obvious to them that we had to be moved to another location. The question was where? After hours of considering the alternatives, Kazimierz chose the best one, namely he built a new hiding place in the attic of his house.

Once his wife approved this idea, he began right away. His son Tadeusz helped him on this job. Again we heard the banging of the hammers along with all the other sounds connected with building. These sounds made us feel good for two reasons. First we knew that they were

keeping us and this eased our fears of being thrown out and secondly we were looking forward to a new place. We hoped that the new place would be more suitable for living. We waited impatiently and looked forward for the time when we would move in. Finally, the day came when our new hiding place was finished and we were being moved to the new location. We were very excited. Again the whole family but the youngest son Mietek participated in moving us from the stable to the attic.

This was not an easy or safe undertaking. They were watching if it was safe to leave the stable and that the neighbors were not outside or watching from the windows or if anyone was walking along the road and could see us. They also had to choose a time when their youngest son was not home. It was not as simple as it seems even though the distance between the stable and house was very small. Everyone was very tense and attentive.

We ran fast, one after another, and we were safely inside the house. The door was then locked and inside we could all rest a little. The next step was much easier. We climbed the ladder and went into the attic. Our first impression was great and we were then more pleased. We did not expect it to be so bright, one had to remember that we stayed for a long time in complete darkness, so even a little light was very bright for us. It did not matter to us.

We started a new chapter in our life in the attic.

This was summer of 1943. This new hiding place compared to the old one was paradise. There was light and no need to light a kerosene lamp. More importantly we didn't have to deal

with two major nuisances such as: the vile smell of the manure and those annoying little flies. I have to correct our view of paradise. It was not exactly a paradise, I exaggerated a bit, because there were problems, but about them later. We were really very happy with this new place which was a great improvement of our living conditions.

Our farmers idea was ingenious and he and his son Tadek worked very hard to build this new hiding place. They did an excellent job. The floor of the attic was not straight but on one side higher. It slanted down. Kazimierz put a second floor above the first floor, but this floor was straight. In doing this he created an empty space between the two floors in the place where the lower floor was slanted. It was enough space to lie down and to hide between the two floors in case of an emergency. The entrance was from the side of the floor bordering with the roof. The floor was covered with heaps of hay, with which the farmer fed the cattle during winter.

We were sitting or lying on the pile of hay. The smell of hay was aromatic and soothed our frayed nerves. We were lucky that no one was allergic to the hay, otherwise sneezing would endanger us all. The air was fresh and we were delighted to breathe fresh air that cleaned out our lungs from the smelly air that was in the stable. We also had light, though not so bright as on the outside, but this luxury meant so much to us. How divine it was not to be in darkness for the whole day. The only problem was that the ceiling was very low and one had to be very careful when moving from one place to another not hit the head. There was more space but we could not walk because we were on the top of an apartment and our steps would betray us by indicating that someone was upstairs. We walked only when downstairs was no neighbor or their little

son. We couldn't walk straight, but to bend our heads down. From time to time, accidentally we hit our heads on the pillars, which were between the roof and the floor.

CHAPTER 21

In the middle of our monotonous existence we got horrible news. It was April 1943 and Barbara came upstairs. As usual, we did not like her visits, because we knew something happened, but we did not expect to hear about such a tragedy which befell the Jews in Warsaw ghetto. Barbara said that the ghetto in Warsaw was burning and that the Jews were burning inside of it. This was a sad day for us. The pain was overwhelming and we cried for our brothers and sisters who suffered so much.

It was a beautiful spring season, the nicest time in whole year, but not for these poor people in the Warsaw ghetto. The sky in ghetto was not blue, but was darkened by the suffocating smoke of the burning houses. Jews in the ghetto will never see the sun shining nor smell the scent of the blooming flowers. The beautiful children will never laugh, play, and become grown-up.

What we did not know was about the events of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. After the war, we were told about the heroism of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. The courageous fighters who heroically fought back and did not want to be led to the slaughter house as animals. The bravery of the young and old, of men, women and children showed the world that they, like the

defenders of Masada against the Romans, choose to die rather than to surrender. Before they died they killed many Germans and held on for much longer than countries did with their military forces. Their heroism will be engraved forever in the memory of Jews from all over the world. The history books will tell the generations to come about proud, heroic Jews in the Warsaw ghetto who were not afraid to stand up to the mighty Germans. It would be a reminder to the whole world that was oblivious to Jewish sufferings and did not move even lift a finger to help the embattled Jews. Some in the world were even glad that the Germans did the dirty work for them. The Jews are an ancient nation that is stubborn and has an inner strength which no force can break.

CHAPTER 22

After a time of living in this more convenient place, we started to take it for granted. The days were longer, and we did not sleep as much as we did in the stable. In the stable we were like bears hibernating in winter time. Being awake for so many hours without having anything to do was not easy for me to endure. I was looking for something to occupy myself. I worked out some kind of a daily routine. In the morning I washed my face and hands with a little water which we had left from the water which our farmer Kazimierz brought to us to use when we peeled the potatoes. Later, I combed my hair for a long period of time, with hundreds of strokes, glad to be active. I had long hair and we did not have scissors to cut my hair. We avoided asking our farmer for anything so not to annoy him. During the many months that we were in the stable (fall, winter and spring) and also during the first days of spring in the attic, we could not wash our bodies or our hair or brush our teeth. We also didn't even have a change of

underwear. How could one explain that the ulcers on my legs, which were so painful without any medication, or sterilized gauze, cleared up by itself. Luckily, we did not get sick living from our non-hygienic practices.

After came the time to eat breakfast which consisted of only potatoes and black coffee. It was good to eat but the same thing over and over was a torture. Potatoes was our main nourishment. I had no books to read. As I mentioned before we never asked our saviors for anything special. We were satisfied that they kept us safe and hidden. We never complained but were quietly sitting in one place so not to put any burden on them and not to annoy them.

What I did have was a pencil and a small copybook. I could write and draw. I was limited on how much I wrote so I did not fill in the whole copybook because that was the only one that I could not have. We also had a chess set which we took with us from our long destroyed apartment. My brother taught me how to play chess. Every day I played one game. It was mentally tiring for me to play more than that a day. Playing chess had a therapeutic effect on me. It helped me escape from the reality of our situation and I relaxed being engaged in the activity of the game. In the attic, like the stable, we had to talk in subdued voices. If someone passing the house heard voices coming from the upstairs, they would wonder who might be upstairs in the 'empty' house. When someone came to the house, a neighbor or someone to buy something in their little grocery store, we could not talk at all. If a relative or neighbor visited them, or even if their little son was home, we had to be silent. During such times we were even afraid even to whisper. It would be suspicious hearing voices from upstairs while all members of the family were inside the house. Many strangers used to come to shop. The bought oil,

flour, matches, salt ,sugar etc., so we had to be very careful not make any noise, or drop anything that could be heard below. Our main goal was not to attract any undue attention. An additional problem existed. Their little boy, Mietek, did not know that we were upstairs. He was not told because he was too young to be trusted with this kind of secret. Our farmers had to watch out that he was not around when they brought food upstairs to us.

Mietek was crazy about pigeons and had a couple of pigeons. One time, a pigeon flew into the attic through a very tiny window, it was rather a square opening in the attic. He wanted to go upstairs to look for the pigeon. His father did not let him go, finding some excuse. We managed to catch the pigeon and throw him out through the opening. Mietek thought that the pigeon flew out by himself and this was the end of the story. He was too young to suspect anything.

The comings and goings of so many strangers house its good and bad sides. The bad side was that we had to restrain from making any movements or even whispering. The good side was that we got to hear human voices and listen to their conversations. To see merely a human face provided some kind of entertainment for us. It was like going to a movie or the theater. I could listen to them for hours with my face glued to the surface of the board which covered the entrance to the attic. I was looking down through the cracks and saw the faces of the young and the old peasants. I heard them laughing and joking. The most banal conversations were amusing and interesting. Sure, I envied that they could talk loudly, they could walk, and they could perform all the essential activities of normal life. I'm certain that they had all types of problems

to deal with. They had to work hard and this showed on their faces, but they did not have to hide, living in constant fear of discovery and then death.

I was also listening to the sounds coming in from the outside. I could see the peasants walking by our house. I heard their voices and the laughter of the children playing outside.

CHAPTER 23

A new season started. It was summer. The days were longer and outside the sun was shining. The birds were singing. The aroma of fresh air and the scent of flowers growing in the garden, came through the openings around the roof of the house. I yearned to go out and see the blue sky and the flowers. It was such an immense need that I could not control my feelings. I cried softly at my despair. The tears that flowed down my face and reached my lips had a salty taste. This was a weak moment for me and after awhile I came to my senses. I reminded myself that I shouldn't complain, I should be thankful to have a hiding place and to be still alive. This place was much better than the smelly and dark stable. In the attic being so close to enjoying all the luxuries of light, fresh air, and more space yet still being trapped in another gilded cage. Would our suffering end. How would it end with us alive or dead. We were extremely lucky that we were away from all the hostilities of the outside world.

We slept less hours. The singing of the birds awakened me in the morning. Their chirping was so melodic and pleasant to hear. They were free to fly where they wanted. We were trapped. In the evenings lying down and being awake, I liked to listen to the croaking of the frogs. Even the rain and the storms had their own fascination for me. I was listening to the pouring rain rushing down and pounding on the roof. The thunder and lightning did not frightened me. It made me feel alive. I tried to find some pleasure in the things with which people, in a normal life, would not bother with or even notice.

Peasants in village were engaged in their daily routines, working in the fields, milking cows, feeding the chickens and geese, which freely ran around. The dogs were barking when seeing strangers. Outside existed a normal life, people worked, loved, hated, were happy, worried, laughed, and cried, they experienced all human feelings. People had dreams, lived and died, but from natural causes.

We lived, but we were confined to an existence of stagnation and uncertainty. The fear of being found out or being denounced by some neighbor or the fears that our saviors might get tired with us and try to get rid of us never left us completely. This uncertainty was killing us slowly. The War was going on and on and we did not see an end to it.

Our farmers were also getting depressed that the war was not ending. Rumors were spreading that the Germans would go from house to house with trained dogs to look for Jews. These were false rumors, to discourage people to protect Jews. One thing was true, that in case someone denounced a Jew the Germans would come and kill not only the Jew but also the Poles

who hid the Jews. They would kill all the children and burn down the house. Our farmers were frightened and anxiously looking for the end to the War. My sister, Anna, had to be a psychologist and a politician to try to expel these fears from our saviors and to give them hope that the War would soon end and that the Germans would be defeated. Barbara started to buy a German newspaper, and Anna read the newspaper (she knew the language well) to them. This was the first time that we could have some news about the outside world and about the War. The newspaper was a good source of information about the events that occurred in the world and about the fighting of the Allied forces with the Germans. Many times the newspaper was not telling the whole truth about their losses, they had to admit to some. When Barbara paid us a visit we knew what bothered her, and my sister referring to the news from the newspaper tried to convince Barbara that the War is approaching an end. She read parts and translated it into Polish. When Barbara left the attic she was in a better mood believing that War would not last long. When days and weeks and months passed and there were no signs of an end to the War it became more difficult to convince Barbara and dispel her fears.

Did my family believe that Germany would be defeated at the end? Yes we believed but the question was when and would we survive until that moment. This we could not predict. We did not know what the near future held for us. One had only to pray to God and not get sick.

We really never were hungry. We ate very little but our bodies did not burn up too much energy by being inactive. Our food lacked the basic ingredients of a balanced diet, no vitamins, no fruits, no vegetable, not too much proteins. The only proteins we received from beans, no dairy products. Eating this high starch diet could cause some health problems. We were very

young and healthy and this played a great role in our staying healthy. We only had some minor problems. My brother, Sam, started to lose face hair, probably from the lack of vitamins in our diet.

During the hot summer the only one time we washed our bodies was when the farmer brought us a pail filled with warm water. We also got to wash our hair. We found in the attic washing powder and my sister washed out our underwear and all our clothes in cold water. This water was what we had left from peeling the potatoes. This job remained with us to the end. The washed clothes dried out very fast because it hot inside the attic. We were fortunate to find this washing powder and be able to do some washing. This powder also lasted until the end of our staying there. Of course the farmers did not know about this.

It was the end of summer. The time was flying, for us very slowly. The same routine, the same monotony, the boredom, and the same fears and doubts.

CHAPTER 24

One day our monotonous life was interrupted by an unusual occurrence. It was early morning and we were still asleep when a tremendous noise awakened us. It was shooting that seemed to be near our house. We became terrified and imagined that the Germans came and were shooting everyone in the town. We were tense expecting the worse to come but nothing

happened. The shooting of the machine guns were silenced and all was quiet again. We were wondering what could it be. When Kazimierz came and brought us breakfast we were told what happened. Gypsies were staying in a camp in the forest not far from our house. Unexpectedly the Germans came in the early morning when the gypsies were asleep and surrounded the camp. They killed everyone in the camp. All the children, women and men, young and old alike, were killed. The barbaric Nazis added a link to the chain of their inhuman acts of crime and death.

After summer, fall came. The days started to get shorter. The leaves started to fall. During the night we heard strong winds blowing, pounding and shaking the branches of the trees. The farmer continued to bring food to us three times daily. Sometimes their daughter, Irenka, came to us. Sometimes their son, Tadeusz, came for a while. I still was looking down through the cracks and listening to every thing what was going on downstairs. I got more and more accustomed to my life here. Sometimes it seemed to me that I was living in this place all my life.

The news from the front was still not encouraging. Our farmers again started to be depressed and had sleepless nights. They worried about the War not coming to an end and about dangers of keeping Jews. Their bad mood increased and we were troubled with uncertainty as to what they had planned to do with us in case the War kept on going.

Danger was lurking from every corner. Everyone was our enemy. The Germans, the Poles, the neighbors, even one could not trust our saviors one hundred percent. How many times it appeared to us that someone was standing too close to our attic and eavesdropping, or that

people coming to our farmers store heard a noise coming from upstairs. Of course, this was only a delusion caused by our over-sensitivity.

One day the bailiff of the village made an assembly of all the villagers. During this meeting he warned them about Jews who might be hidden by some of them. He tried to scare them by saying that the Germans had specially trained dogs who sniffed out these hiding Jews. He continued on that if someone knew about a hiding Jew or if someone was hiding a Jew, he had to come to him to inform him about this. This would be confidential. He would call the Polish police who secretly would get rid of the hiding person, in other words he would be killed, and nothing would happen to peasant who hid the Jew, and nobody would know about this. Otherwise, there would be a disastrous outcome when the Germans came and found a hidden Jew. Everyone in the household, not only the Jew, but the whole Polish family would be killed and the house burnt down. Poor Kazimierz, how he must have felt upon hearing these scary words of warning from the village bailiff. Not letting anyone notice what impression this made on him, he talked with neighbors care free. Inside he was shaken and confused. Barbara came and told us about this horrible meeting.

Hearing this story we felt very bad and my sister Anna tried to ease her fears and explained to her that Germans only came to a place when someone was denounced and it was unrealistic to suggest that they might go from one house to another. We did not know if my sister's words convinced her and calmed her fears. She left and we remained with our less optimistic thoughts. We deliberated about why she come to tell us this. Was this merely because she wanted to share her worries with us or is she preparing us that our stay there was

coming to an end. On the other hand how could they ask us to leave this place. This would endanger them even more in case we were caught by the Germans. With this a morbid thought crept into our mind. Could they use the services of the village bailiff and have us disappear. Right away we dismissed this as insane. They were deeply religious people and they would never commit murder.

CHAPTER 25

The time was dragging on without new excitement. What was good and we did not complain about this. What was important was that the farmers kept us and never mentioned this meeting again. They were busy tending their farm and selling grocery products to the villagers. We did not think about anything special, we lived in some kind of lethargy, until a new horror descended upon us.

The entrance to the attic was through an opening covered with a square board which we locked inside the attic. Attached to the attic was a ladder which was used to go to the attic. There were no stairs. When the farmer brought us food, he knocked and we opened up the bolt. My brother heard steps on the ladder and being sure that this was the farmer, not waiting to hear the knock, opened the cover. There was a stranger standing there. Realizing his mistake, he quickly put down the cover but this was too late. The stranger saw him, not exactly my brother's face but his legs but this was enough. The man who saw him was their neighbor, Jozek Ryczek.

The neighbor wanted to borrow the ladder and since the farmer was not at home he went to take the ladder by himself. He had difficulties to move this ladder because we locked the cover inside the attic. This was a very serious situation which could easily turn catastrophic. When the farmer brought us our meal, we told him about this incident. The farmers went out of their mind. They did not know what to do or how to prevent tragic consequences. The situation was critical for us and for our saviors. It was true that the neighbor was their friend. He would not denounce them but he could pressure them to go to the village bailiff and turn us over to the Polish police. We did not believe that our farmers wanted us to be killed. For a long time they endangered their lives and all their efforts that they put into saving us would be in vain. There was another possibility, Jozek would start to gossip and tell his relatives or friends that someone was hiding in Kazimierz house. This gossip would spread, as what usually happens with gossip, until it would reach our farmers enemy (or the village bailiff) who would denounce him. In any case, the situation was not too hopeful. Again our reasoning came back to the morbid thought. They could not ask us to leave because if we were caught by the Germans and tortured we could reveal the place where we were hidden and who was hiding us. What remained was one solution. To save their lives they would have to get rid of us. Was there any other solution? We tried to push away these macabre thoughts. Again and again, we considered all possibilities. One conclusion contradicted the other. All night we did not sleep. We whispered softly about our serious situation and were prepared for the worst to come. This was mental torture which we created for ourselves.

Barbara and Kazimierz also had a sleepless night talking over and over about this new situation. We never could guess what kind of alternatives they considered. We only knew about the decision and plan chosen by them.

The first thing what our farmers did, before finding a way to get out from this mess was to ask us to go to another hiding place in case the neighbor would go upstairs to find out what was going on the attic, in time when they would be away.

The neighbor could also stay near by the house and eavesdrop if someone on the attic was talking or to listen if there were some noises. This was a precaution but did not solve the problem in case the neighbor would gossip what could create serious implications. He by himself would not denounce to the Germans because he was their friend. The new hiding prepared for us was also on attic. Above a little storage building, where the farmers kept potatoes. This attic was very small but was enough space for five people to sit. The farmer cut out a hole in the floor of the attic, through which in emergency we could slip down to the storage space, which was full with potatoes. We would be covered with potatoes to conceal us. So during the same day we went to the new hiding. The farmers, the daughter Irenka and son Tadeusz were watching if an undesired person was not around or a stranger was coming. In haste one by one we walked, rather run to the new place not seen by any strangers. We were glad that our saviors did not ask us to leave and nobody cared that the place was not livable for a longer period of time. So we were crammed in this scanty place, frightened about what could happen to us. The new hiding place did not give us security because it did not remove the urgent problem; it was only some kind of a safeguard. Barbara the farmer's wife was not educated, but a simple woman, who possessed common sense and was smart and courageous. She talked over with her husband how to deal with this problem and finally she had an idea how to handle this.

Her plan was to talk to the neighbor who saw my brother, his name was Jozek Ryczek, and to tell him who was upstairs in such away that he would believe in her story.

During the war between Germany and Russia some divisions of Ukrainians joined Germans, because of their hate to communism. Being strongly nationalistic they believed that Hitler would give them freedom and an independent state. The Ukrainians were disappointed when the Germans put them into camps and even killed. Many Ukrainians escaped from camps to join back the Russians army or became deserters. They walked through Polish villages, sometimes the Poles let them sleep over night or gave them some food.

Kazimierz agreed to her plan. Barbara did not give a second thought but right away she invited Jozek to her house. She gave him some vodka to drink and she drank too. She used to drink sometimes when she was depressed and drinking put her in a good mood and eased her fears of hiding Jews. Kazimierz never drank vodka. During their light social conversation not letting him recognize that she knew that he saw someone upstairs she mentioned innocently that an Ukrainian came to them and he begged them to give him something to eat, he was almost starving and to let him sleep overnight. He was so tired and exhausted and his look was frightened that they took pity of him and let him sleep overnight on the attic. The Ukrainian was very thankful and gave them some his clothes. Barbara took out man's old clothes to show him as a proof of her story. She took one pair of pants and she gave it to the neighbor Jozek as a present and asked him not to tell about this to anybody even to his family because they could have serious problems. He promised to keep the secret. When after a couple of days nothing special happened we were aloud to go back to our former hiding place. Jozek kept his promise because nobody in the village ever mentioned this

incident. But we never could be sure if he believed in Barbara's story, or if he suspected something. But one thing was sure that from this moment we lost our piece of mind. We were more neurotic and our imagination played games with us. During the night when the wind was blowing and was shaking the branches we were awakened frightened it seemed to us that someone is coming to our house to look for us. When we heard steps outside the house we got suspicious and were thinking may be Jozek the neighbor was watching our house and eavesdropping to find out who really was on the attic. We tried to push away these thoughts of suspicion.

CHAPTER 26

Life was going on, people on the outside world lead a normal life with all of its problems. We were not dead, but also not alive in the full meaning of this word. We were living in stagnation, reduced to the most primitive elements of human existence. We ate and slept.

Days were long and the nights were long, and the time was moving so slowly that it seemed to us that it is standing in place. This was only our impression because in reality time was passing fast and the seasons followed one after another.

We were waiting for good news and hoping the end of the war would soon come. But many times we lost hope that the war would ever come to an end. Barbara's visits did not make us too happy, especially the news that some Jews were caught in hiding. These visits made us nervous. Barbara was in low spirits when she heard bad news. People in the village did not read newspapers and all their knowledge about the war was based on rumors, so when she heard people saying that

Germany would win the war she believed this and became frustrated and immediately ran to us share with us her worries. We tried to persuade her that this was impossible since almost the whole world was fighting Germany. Our source of information, which we used to have from reading the German newspaper, ended abruptly. Barbara stopped buying it for us because the salesman, seeing a peasant buying a German newspaper, got suspicious, and asked her for whom was she buying it and she was afraid that this could give him a clue that she is buying the German newspaper for a Jew. This important source of information was not available to us anymore, though the Germans did not write always the truth, one had to read between the lines, but still provided us with news about the war.

Now we lived in complete ignorance of what was going on the front. All our information we received from Barbara which most of the time was unreliable. Kazimierz never visited us for conversation and he never brought us any scary stories. He was only bringing us food and taking out the bucket. He was a quiet, honest and hard working man. We never heard them to quarrel, use vulgar words or fight with their children. It was a good and peaceful family.

For a while our life was uneventful. But one day we had some excitement. Our farmer's mother came to visit them. When she entered the house she felt drops of water falling on her head. Accidentally one of us overturned a glass with water and the water was dripping down. The grandmother, surprised, asked her son Kazimierz why the water was coming down from the attic. He said that this might be a cat. She was an old lady and of course she believed in his explanation. We were lucky that this happened to Kazimierz mother not to a neighbor, or villager who used to come to buy groceries. This was a small incident but could have a more serious implication.

CHAPTER 27

There was only one change in our life upon the arrival of a new season. The fall was ended and winter began, the winter of 1943. The warm weather gave place to a cold and frosty time. The days were short and the night set in very early. This caused us to be more hours in darkness.

There was not heard anymore chirping and singing of the birds and I missed it very much. The roads were covered with heavy snow and this prevented villagers to come to buy groceries in our farmers little store. I lost my chance to get some entertainment while listening to their gossip. Inside the house was quiet, but a little noise came from outside when children were laughing and screaming playing with snow. And the dogs were barking. Winters in Poland are in general very severe, but that winter when we stayed in the attic was extremely cold. There was a lot of snow, freezing temperatures and strong winds. Around the roof there was an open space through which a constant flow of fresh and aromatic air came into the attic.

Also the square opening in the roof which supplied our dwelling with light was very much appreciated by us. We did not have to light any more the kerosene lamp. These two accommodations were a blessing to us during spring, autumn and summer. But the picture was different in winter with the strong winds blowing the snow into the attic, or the cold air coming into and making the temperature freezing. To prevent falling snow inside we filled the openings with hay and straw. But this did not protect us from the cold. Picture us sitting on the hay without any movement in the attic where the temperature was below zero. Some nights were extremely cold and our farmer used to check on us in the morning to see if we were not frozen to death. If we had been old people our survival chance would be minimal, but being young and healthy was a great plus in maintaining some body heat.

Having very warm winter clothes and eiderdown covers played a very big role in staying alive. We were sitting on heavy layers of heaps of hay, dressed very warmly, winter coats, woolen hats, woolen gloves, and woolen scarves and covered with eiderdowns. One can say that eiderdowns kept us alive during the frosty winter nights. We even joked that after the war we would built a monument for the geese because they supplied the down, which saved us from freezing to death. We laughed from the joke. Laughter was an unusual thing in our circumstances. We were deprived of the healing power of the laughter.

It was not easy to endure the wintertime. We were eating in the gloves and we did not even wash our face. Besides the cold there was another inconvenience. The daily light was for a much shorter time and this meant more hours sitting in darkness, and more hours of sleeping. In the daytime there was less light than before because the opening was filled with straw and hay, but still was not complete dark. Sleeping for us was a blessing, but sometimes I could not fall asleep .I was lying quietly, I stopped a long time to complain. We looked a little strange. A group of people bundled up in untidy clothes with pale faces and bewildered looks in our eyes. We were like animals that hibernate during the winter season.

One day I got a cold with high fever. We had a thermometer, which we took with us. I took my temperature; it was really very high. We did not even tell our farmers that I was sick because she would get frightened to have a sick person in hiding. She could not call a doctor. So we kept this to ourselves. I was very hot and wanted to uncover myself, so my brother Leo all night watched me and did not let me throw away the cover being afraid that I might catch pneumonia. Miraculously

after several days I got well, without aspirin, or other drugs for colds or even I did not have tea or other fluid to drink during the day or night.

While describing our life in hiding it is hard to recall all the small details which time has erased them from my memory. I am sure that at time when they took place they were very important to us. But with time passing they started to be less and less important and finally they disappeared from our memory. The same was true about feelings. How hard to reproduce from memory and recall the past, which every minute, every hour every day was abundant with various kinds of feelings, worries, despair and hope. But some events lingered in my memory and remained so fresh as it would happen just yesterday and time did not erase them.

Chapter 28

This winter a very serious occurrence took place, which could have severe consequences. We used to pay some money for the food. After a period of time we ran short of cash and had no money left to pay for our board. So my sister Anna decided to go to Debra to sell a golden necklace. In Debica we befriended a Polish woman who was married to a Jew who converted to Catholicism. But this fact did not make any difference to the Germans he was for them a Jew. They put him in ghetto and he was taken away with the transport of Jews to an unknown place. I mention this because my sister did not fear to go to her, and trusted her that she would not denounce her. Barbara and her son Tadeusz drove my sister in a wagon to Debica. When they came to the town my sister Anna went to the Polish friend to sell her the necklace and Barbara and Tadeusz waited for her. My sister spent a long time in the house of the Polish woman, because the woman had not enough money to buy the necklace so she went to someone to borrow the needed money. This

transaction took more time than expected, because of this complication. Barbara and Tadeusz waited for a long time and Anna did not come back. They started to be worried what happened to her. They waited a little longer, but in vain, she did not show up. It was getting late so they jumped quickly to the conclusion that the woman betrayed her and called the police or Gestapo and my sister was arrested. They were sure that this was the case. They did not wait any longer but they drove home in a hurry. Barbara short of breath came to us upstairs right away. Before she even started to talk looking at her face we recognized right away that something terrible happened. Her face was pale and her eyes had an expression of fear. With trembling voice she said that Germans caught my sister Anna, and she lamented about the grave situation in which we were now. She did not say that she might be she was caught but was sure that this happened to Anna. The bad news shocked us so much that we even did not asked her how it happened. Hopelessly we looked at each other. There was nothing to say. We could not think rationally. We were in some kind of panic.

We cried and could not find any words to ease the fears of Barbara, We knew too well that the Gestapo had good methods to break people's spirits and by torturing people they were able to find out the place where they were hidden and by whom. Not only we were thinking about this possibility, but also our farmers. No wonder that Barbara was out of her mind. Barbara left the attic. We were in despair and waited the worst to come. We did not know what our farmers decided to do with us. To throw us out was also not the best idea. We could be also caught and this would put them also in a grave danger. But we also knew that we could not stay here any longer. And again a thought which once tormented us revived: could they get rid of us in a less human way namely to kill us in order to protect themselves and their family.

But killing us would not solve the farmers' dangerous situation. Once my sister would tell the Gestapo the truth they would kill the farmers and their children and burn the house. It seemed to us there was no way to solve this difficult problem. It was very cold, but we were sitting frozen not only from low temperature but also from anxiety and fear, which chilled the blood in our veins. After some hours of uncertainty about what could happen to us and completely without hope, the unexpected thing happened. Barbara came upstairs to us, she was very excited, her face was flushed from strong emotions and she cried out several times that our sister came back and that she was downstairs in her apartment. We could not believe our ears what we heard. I thought that this was a dream. But this was not a dream but a reality. My sister came upstairs and stood in flesh and body. She took out a bundle of money wrapped in a newspaper and gave it to Barbara. Barbara embraced my sister and kissed her. You are my million of dollars she cried out emotionally. Never again I would let you go out for money. She took the money which my sister gave her and dispersed it all around. It had a happy ending.

We experienced mental torture of despair, fear and imagined the worst things that would happen to us. These were our feelings and emotions of uncertainty what next moment holds for us but were not supported by concrete facts, because we did not know what really happened to our sister. By my sisters' experiences were real and not in the imagination. As I wrote before my sister had to stay much longer in the house of the Polish acquaintance as she presumed because of some delay in selling the chain. Being glad that she sold the chain and got some money not expecting any troubles ahead she left the house and went to the place where Barbara and Tadek were supposed to wait for her. One could imagine her disappointment and frustration not finding them waiting for her. She could not believe her eyes and thought that maybe she made a mistake and went to the

wrong place. She looked around and strained her eyes but in vain. There was no sign of them. Bewildered she had no choice but to walk to the village. She walked but was not sure in which direction to go. After walking for a short time she noticed a peasant driving by. She stopped him and asked if he could give her a ride. The peasant agreed to take her. My sister was thankful for giving her a ride. Happy she climbed the wagon and sat down next to the peasant. My sister did not only look Jewish, but she looked as a peasant dressed in Barbara's dress and had a scarf on her head. They had a nice conversation and in the middle of their conversation she made a terrible blunder about some Christian holiday. Her ignorance caught him by surprise and he looked at her suspiciously. He even in some words let her know that he knew of her being Jewish. She realized that to continue driving with him would put her in a dangerous situation. How could she trust this strange peasant? He could take her to the police station. Not waiting any moment longer she jumped down from the wagon. Many times Poles catching Jews turned them in to the police, or Gestapo. This peasant could be an honest person without any bad intentions, but my sister did not want to take a chance, to prove his honesty. She started to walk very fast, almost running. She was listening if somebody was running after her. She did not hear any steps behind her. It was fortunate that she knew the directions to our village. At the beginning of the conversation she asked the peasant about directions.

It was winter with a lot of snow. The temperature was below zero. It was freezing with strong winds blowing the snow and making walking difficult. She walked and walked and she realized that she had only a vague idea how to reach our village, even though the peasant told her how to reach village of Zasow. She became very tired, her hands were ice cold and the same her legs and her face was burning from the blowing cold wind. She had a strong desire to sit down and rest. But

her reason warned her not to do this and to give into this temptation. She tried hard to overcome her impulse because she knew well that if she would sit down even for a short time she would fall asleep and this meant that she would freeze to death. She walked miles completely exhausted and nearly collapsing.

She distinctly heard a voice repeating many time to go forward, to go forward and not to stop. She looked around not seeing anybody. Obviously this was her imagination which played tricks with her. It was hard to understand by reason only how could she endure it, to walk so many miles in such bad weather conditions and how she managed to find our village and the house of our farmers. One had to believe that a good angel led her all the way to the farmer's house. Once again a miracle happened and once again God saved us and our saviors and their family.

\ CHAPTER 29

A most visible indication that there was some good news about military gains by the allies was when Kazimierz brought us bigger portions of food and even a piece of pork. But the piece was too small to divide among all of us so my family gave the whole piece to me. Eating pork was forbidden in Jewish dietary laws, and anytime I ate it or pieces of lard I had a feeling of guilt though I knew that in our circumstances it is not a sin.

When the war took a better turn our hope was increasing day by day. But our fear did not end and we could not predict what kind of complications could take place in our existence. We had to live from one day to another and pray to God that no misfortune would happen to us.

The war was going on and we anxiously waited for good news about the war and our farmers waited too. It was true that the war took a little better turn for the allies but it still did not end. But what was more important our saviors were in better mood believing that the war would end soon. Our life seemed the same, one day was alike the other, with same daily routines which were minimal. The good news about the German losses made us happy and our hope for surviving grew stronger. The light at the end of the tunnel began to twinkle. To sustain our hope that the war would not last long meant a lot for us. Hope gives people strength to endure the most harsh conditions of life. Hope is a vital force that can produce miracles. One who loses hope loses everything. Our feeling of hope went through different stages and grades. The intensity of hope was changing constantly according to the various circumstances. It was strong or weak, it diminished or increased, but we never lost hope completely.

After staying in hiding for such a long period of time I got adjusted to our miserable vegetation. I started to consider my life in the attic as a normal state of life. I got accustomed to my daily small routines. Human instinct for survival is very strong, and one in order to stay alive had to adapt to existing conditions and to cope with any circumstances.

When there was no stranger in our farmers' house we talked or rather whispered very softly. We always had to be very careful because someone passing the house could hear us. We were always uneasy thinking that the neighbor Jozek might stand by the house and eavesdrop. When our hope of surviving the war started to be more promising it was very interesting to notice that the main topic in our conversations with my sisters was about food. We did not talk about any serious matters; we did not talk about our situation or the past. We talked about what kind of food

we were going to eat; what kind of dishes we would cook when the war is ended and we would be free. By talking about food we strengthen our belief that soon the war would come to the end and Germany would be defeated. This could have a deeper explanation that might indicate that food was the most important factor in human life. When hunger was satisfied men looked to satisfy their spiritual needs.

The time was passing at a snails pace. We were waiting for the war to come to its final conclusion. There was a lot of activity in the sky, airplanes flying day and night there was fierce fighting on all fronts with the allies having an upper hand. We did not get any detailed or reliable information. We got only little bits of information from our saviors, who like other peasants never read newspapers and got their news from neighbors who in turn got news from peasants who went to the town where people read newspapers or even listened to radios which were broadcasting news from England. Villagers altered the news and they added their own opinions. But we wanted to believe in good news. And our farmers believed in the encouraging news and this fact had a significant influence on their behavior toward us. We got less and less upset when Barbara paid us short visits. She was more relaxed and less moody and her eyes had a soft expression. There were favorable signs on the horizon but still our existence remained on the same level without any change.

The winter was nearing to the end. The days were longer and the snow started to melt. The birds started to return from far countries, and the flowers started to burst forth and blossom. The earth awakened from the long winter sleep and the renewal of nature began. The spring came, and with its entire splendor brought new life to nature. We survived the winter and welcomed the new

season. We had behind us the hardship of the wintertime. We put away our warm clothes and warm covers, and were so glad to be able to sit in light clothes not to be all wrapped up. We could take out the straw and hay from the openings and from the square window. It was so good to have more light and not to freeze. Now we did not have to sleep for so many hours or to sit in darkness. More people frequented the house of our farmers. I could again engage myself in my old entertainment namely to listen to the conversations of the farmers coming to buy groceries. Even the dogs were more alive barking louder. And the children were making more noise than usually playing outside. It was spring 1944.

CHAPTER 29

The war was still being fought, but allied forces were moving forward with successful military operations and the Germans were getting some beatings and had great losses. The news was heart warming but for us there was still danger looming and we could not predict what the nearest future might bring. We had to live from one day to another and not to speculate. Every day, which passed quietly and without nerve breaking excitement, was a blessing. But to live for a long time in peaceful vegetation was not meant for us. Our fate was to be exposed again to a frightening experience.

Our farmers used to produce home made whiskey, called "bimber". Though this was illegal and punishable by law all farmers in the village were engaged in the production of "bimber". The authorities knew about this production and to stop it they made inspections from time to time in farmers' houses to find proof of their illegal whisky making. One day a rumor was spreading that inspectors, Poles and Germans together would go from one house to another to look for whisky.

The rumors proved to be true. Three inspectors went from one house to another to search the houses for hidden whisky. Peasants used to hide the bottles of whisky deep in the piles of straw or hay, which they had in barns or in attics. So the first place from which they started their inspection was the attic. Our farmers were frightened to death hearing this news. Barbara came upstairs and we knew right away that there was some emergency. She told us right away to go to our hiding place. We, in a hurry, removed to the hiding place under the double floor all our belongings not leaving any trace that someone stayed there. We straightened out the hay and we crawled into our hiding place. As mentioned before the farmer built a double floor, so we were laying in the space between the two floors, and the farmer put back the layers of hay to cover the floor. Our hearts were beating fast; we were lying motionless, afraid even to breathe. The situation was really dangerous while looking for the whisky they could easily notice at the end of the floor that there were two floors. Once they would notice it they could look inside through the opening suspecting that the farmer hid whisky inside. They would be surprised when instead of whisky they would find hiding Jews. One could easily guess what would happen. Lying inside we thought about this possibility. We were trembling from fear and waiting for the worst to come. Every minute was like an hour. It was hard to tell how long we waited for the inspectors to come upstairs. We heard steps and were sure that inspectors were coming. This was a morbid feeling. To our relief there were no inspectors coming upstairs but only Barbara. She told us what happened. The farmers were out of their mind watching the inspectors coming; they were standing on the steps ready to go into the house. Unexpectedly one of the inspectors changed his mind and said to the two other officials that it was too late and that he had no time so they had to skip this house. The others agreed because they were glad to go home and all of them left the place. This happy ending one could consider

again as a miracle, also this time a good angel was watching over us. The farmers Barbara and Kazimierz were overwhelmed with joy seeing them leaving the premises. We, also, with great joy, went out from the hiding, straightened out our bodies and breathed easier. One times more we escaped the danger of being caught.

The rest of the springtime passed without any changes in our daily existence. The weather became warmer. The sun rose higher in the sky. A new season was coming and we still were in hiding place. It was summer 1944. The war was approaching to the end. The allied forces were wining and the scanty news, which we got about the war, made us happy. Also Barbara and Kazimierz were more relaxed and they were in good mood that was shown in their behavior. Our portions of food got larger and sometimes included a piece of pork.

And we were very pleased when Kazimierz brought a full pail with warm water and a piece of soap to wash our bodies. It was the first wash after the long winter and spring. We had to be very careful not use too much water by one person and to leave enough water for everyone. My sisters also washed our underwear with the water left from potato peeling and because it was very hot it dried fast and we felt good to get rid of the dirt from our bodies and to wear clean underwear. In wintertime we washed only our hands, in spring we washed also our face with water only. Two times during our stay we washed our bodies during the two summers which we spent in hiding place. But surprisingly we did not suffer from skin disorders such as irritation, inflammation or rash. Even my hair washed only twice during our stay there was healthy and shining, maybe because I spent hours to comb it just to kill the time. The smallest activity was important to me, adding some flavor to the monotony of my existence.

When listening to the talk of the peasants coming to our farmers I noted that more and more the subject of war came up. Even by straining my ears I could not catch the full sentences, only fragments. What I heard was that Germany was withdrawing its forces, that the war was approaching its end.

And our yearning to be free grew with the good prognosis of the victory of the alien forces and Germany's defeat. But at the same time we were not out of the woods. The fear that something unexpected might destroy our hope was rooted in our minds. The same as someone who was dealing with fire might get burned. In our existence the smallest mistake could bring disaster, the smallest innocent event could end in tragedy. Our imagination and mistrust added only fuel to our fears. How many times we thought that our neighbor Jozek Ryczek was standing in front of the house and listening. Our whispering became so soft that it hardly could be understood. During the night hearing the wind blowing and moving the branches of the trees we fantasized that the Gestapo was coming to catch us. We were subjected to unrealistic and realistic fears. These fears were entangled and was many times hard to differentiate them. We were caught in a web of different thoughts, emotions and feelings. The best remedy was not to think, but to escape to realms of fantasy and dreams.

One day our fear of unexpected events materialized when a group of German soldiers came to the house of our farmers to stay for several days. One of the Germans who knew Polish said to our farmers that they wished to sleep in the attic on the hay. This announcement made our farmers tremble inside. They could not show on the outside how their request made them feel somehow

uncomfortable and to evoke in them some suspicion. The situation looked very serious. But Barbara did not lose her self-confidence and her mind began to work fast, to find a way to go out of this impasse and find a solution to this problem.

She came up with an original and clever idea, but now she had to introduce her suggestion to the Germans in such a way, that the Germans would agree to her suggestions. In the same time to avert any suspicion that her objection of their sleeping upstairs had some reason. In a very convincing way she advised them to sleep in the barn instead of the attic. Her arguments were that the attic was very hot with no air and on the contrary it was more convenient to sleep in the hay in the barn, and that the place was spacious and airy.

The Germans thank her for her good advice and gladly agreed to sleep in the barn. She felt a great sense of relief from the extreme tension inside her. Not wasting any time, she went upstairs to the attic to tell us about the visit of the Germans. But she had no time to go into details because she had to carry down hay to place it in the barn since there was no hay in the barn only straw. She prepared the barn for the Germans when they would come to sleep there. The Germans slept in the barn for several nights and were very satisfied with this arrangement. During the day they stayed in the house. They cooked, they ate and they rested. It was hard to guess who they were, was their division destroyed and they survived and were aiming to join other units, or were they deserters. Their stay made us understandably very nervous. We were extremely careful not to make the slightest noise. All day we were sitting almost motionless, not whispering. Almost all day they in the house and in the evening they went to sleep. Kazimierz took special caution when

bringing us food upstairs. He brought us soup cooked by the soldiers. The soup tasted very good, it was farina with raisins. This meal was a nice treat.

This was a comical situation but spiced with a dangerous element. Downstairs German soldiers and upstairs hiding Jews who were eating soup cooked by German soldiers. Of course the German soldiers did not suspect anything. We heard German soldiers talking, we heard German soldiers laughing and walking. The sound of German language alone made us uncomfortable and frightened us. The days of their stay were nerve racking and when they left we were relieved and our farmers were relieved too. Our farmers were now free from fear that the soldiers could spot Kazimierz climbing the ladder to deliver us food. They experienced great tension and stress during their stay in the house. They were afraid that we would cough or make some noise what would attract the attention of the soldiers. The farmers regained their peace of mind.

And our life returned to its normal course. As before, I was waiting for the meals, I was combing my hair, I was playing one game of chess, and I was listening to the singing of the birds, to the noise of children playing outside. And for my daily entertainment listening to the peasants standing in the entrance-hall.

When we heard steps on the ladder during the day in a time when Kazimierz was not coming to bring our meals, we knew that Barbara was coming with some good news. Now it was different than before when Barbara was depressed thinking that the war would never end. Her visits made us

nervous and we were glad that Barbara was not visiting us. Every time she used to come we knew beforehand that she would deliver us some bad news, such as: Germany would win the war, or that Gestapo was finding Jews in hiding places. The subject was always the same; there was only some variation in content. But now the picture changed altogether she would bring us news that the Germans suffered great losses and the Russians from the east were pushing the German army closer and closer to the German borders. More and more airplanes were roaming the skies. The traffic in the skies became greater. We heard the sound of machine guns, explosions of bombs. This was a sign that the front was near us and there was a fierce fight going on. The Germans retreated from their positions and this was called in German language: "Rückzug" (Retreat)

CHAPTER 30

When the bomb started to fall down on our village and some houses were on fire there was a panic in the village. Frightened peasants left their houses and ran away to hide in the fields or other villages which were not exposed to bombing. But we could not run away, we were not in a position to leave the house and to be seen by the villagers.

The peasants in the village would wonder who were these strange people and from where did they come. It was easy to recognize that we were Jews who left some hiding place. Our faces were pale, my brothers were unshaven and our clothes were dirty and wrinkled. We decided to stay disregarding the danger of being exposed to bombing. There was still a chance of surviving because we believed it was impossible that bombs would hit every house. We hoped that our house would be not destroyed. But by leaving the place we would be in great danger of being denounced by the peasants. So we had no choice but to stay and hope for the best. Our farmer Kazimierz did not want

us to be killed by the bombs. He hid us for so long and in the last minute when the war was coming to an end it would be a shame to perish. All efforts, problems and fears that our farmers experienced during our stay with them would be wasted. They knew well as we knew how dangerous it would be to suddenly to appear in the village where people knew each other. But he also knew that the village was under the German fire and that many houses were burning. Barbara with the children left the house but our farmer remained to do something in order to protect us from falling bombs.

There was on the premises a shed where the farmers stored tools, brooms, brushes, hoes, rakes etc. This was the place where the farmer dug an underground bunker for us to stay inside in case the house would burn and protect us from explosions of bombs. We went inside and the opening of bunker was covered with a board and tools were put on the top. When Kazimierz finished the job he left the house in hurry. We were left by ourselves. All the neighbors also ran away and the whole village was deserted. One could assume that we were the only one who remained in the village. We were laying underground and listening to the sporadic sound of exploding bombs. The airplanes were flying very low above our house. When an airplane was passing the roar was deafening. Squeezed in the small place we were apprehensive of the smallest noise from outside.

After some hours being in the bunker we did not feel good, there was no air to breathe. So we went out to catch up breath. It was for completely quiet for a while so we thought it was save to be outside. We thought that there would be no more bombing and that no danger was threatening us. But our thinking and calculations were totally wrong.

Late in the night we heard steps and voices. We started to be a little nervous. What could it be, we wondered? With passing time the steps and voices got louder and louder. We were stricken with horror when we recognized that the language spoken was German. The steps of the Germans were closer and closer and we could distinctly hear their conversation. Now we knew for sure that German soldiers were coming to our farmers' premises. In a hurry we went to our underground bunker and put the cover on the top. Motionless we were listening to what was going on. The German soldiers came and they were walking in the garden and talking. From their conversation we figured out that they intended to stay on the premises. We heard that they were digging in the ground, we heard knocking and pounding noise. It looked as if they were building something or installing a military base. The soldiers did not sleep all night, working intensively, and we also did not sleep. We did not work with our hands but with our minds. This was the most dangerous situation in which we found ourselves during the all time while we were in hiding. We thought feverishly about what to do. We knew that in the morning the German soldiers would for sure uncover our bunker and find us inside. One could easily picture the scene. The German soldiers ordering us to go out from the bunker and torturing us before killing us on the spot, Germans, losing the war would take revenge. And even not being Nazis, they would not have mercy. We could not take any chances counting on their mercy. This was a gruesome picture we had before our eyes. It was obvious that we could not remain inside the bunker. This would be an indication that we were Jews in hiding. Germans in general, did not recognize from appearance who is Jewish or who is Polish. For them everyone was the same. One choice was left to go out from the bunker and to pretend that we were the owners of this farm. Luckily there were no neighbors to see us. All

the houses were empty. So we started one by one to go out from the bunker. Because the bunker was in the shed we could leave the bunker not being noticed by the German soldiers. It was dawn and the soldiers were busy installing cannons probably to establish a military position. First, my sister Anna came out from the bunker. The soldiers did not pay any attention to her. She went to the house she dressed herself in Barbara's dress and wrapped her head with a scarf and she looked exactly like a peasant. She milked a cow and gave milk to the soldiers. She had problems milking the cow but she managed to milk the cow. The German soldiers were convinced that she was the daughter of the owner of this farm. Later I emerged out of the bunker. After me my sister De came out. Fortunately the German soldiers being busy did not take any notice of us. , Even if they saw us, they would think of us as being the children of the farmers. They had more important things on their minds than to observe us. I was blond, petite and looked like a Polish girl.

I was not afraid that the German soldiers would recognize me as being Jewish so I took the courage to approach the Germans and to talk to them in order to divert their attention from looking at my brothers who were unshaven with pale faces. Their appearance could evoke suspicion that something fishy was going on. We had to play roles alike on stage. With a very innocent voice I said in Polish to the Germans, please give me a shovel we would dig a bunker in the field to protect us from falling bombs. What I said did not make too much sense, I thought that they did not understand Polish anyway. But I was wrong one soldier knew Polish and translated it into the German language. They laughed heartily and ignored my request. I had good intentions, but my talking to the German soldiers had an adverse effect. Now they were more aware of our presence, they looked at my brothers, luckily they saw only their backs. What they saw was so ridiculous that they started to laugh. One of my brothers pulled out a goat from the barn and quickly left the

premises. The other brother took out a large fat pig. But my brother had some difficulty pulling it out from the barn. This was a very stubborn and very difficult pig. The Soldiers watching my brother's struggle with the fat pig had a good laugh. One said to the other: look at the stupid and ignorant peasants. Bombs could kill them any moment but evidently they cared more about their pig and goat than about themselves. All of us left the place as fast as we could, happy that the German soldiers took us for the children of the owners of the farm and did not suspect that we were Jews. Even if they had not realized that we were Jews in hiding we had leave the premises; it was too dangerous to play the role of owners of the farm. A stranger could pass the farm and see us, or a neighbor could come back. We could not predict what could happen. It was true, that at first moment they took us for the owners of the farm, but everything went in such a fast pace that they had not even time to observe us. But the situation would change in case we would stay longer. They might wonder why we looked so shabby and recognize that we were not Poles, and they would wonder where our parents were. We also realized by leaving the premises we would be exposed to the view of villagers that too could put us in a risky position. Between the two evils we chose the second choice, which looked a little less threatening. We were counting on the confusion and panic existing in the village caused by steady bombing, explosions and houses burning.

The first thing what my brothers did was to let the goat and pig loose. The pig behaved well, he just stretched himself on the ground and closed his eyes, but the goat had no intention of leaving my brother Sam. He ran after him like a dog after his master. For a long time he ran after him, it was hard to explain why, but finally he got tired and he stopped running. We ran and ran, the bombs were falling, so we did not have any choice but to ran to the fields. There were piles of cut grains. We hid ourselves under the heaps of grain sheaves to protect us from falling bombs.

This was not the best idea. The piles of grain started to burn when hit by bombs. We heard the screams of peasants injured or even killed. We did not know who was bombing the place the Germans or the Russians? It was obvious that the front was very close. We wondered why they bombed this particular village where there were no military forces or base, nor important military installments? The only sign of Germans was the small group of German soldiers lodging on our farmers' premises. Why were they targeting civilians? We did not find an explanation. But it was not time for any speculation. We were running for our lives. And we could not lose any time. The noise of the airplanes flying so low over our heads was almost deafening to us

We had to run away from the field. By staying there we could be hit by bombs since this place was under fire. We ran and we heard the explosions of bombs. The bombs were falling close to us. Any minute we could be killed, only by miracle the bombs fell between us but not on us and luckily the shrapnel fell far away from us. My brother who had some military experience gave us orders when to run and when to lie down. My dress was torn by a small piece of shrapnel, but did not hurt me. We were fortunate not to be killed by the bombs. It was an extremely hot day, we perspired and our faces were flushed. We were thirsty. We did not feel hunger even though we did not eat for a whole day. We lost our shoes and we were running barefoot. The sun was burning and there were moments when I felt being near a faint. From what source did our strength come? Was it our youth or the strong instinct for survival? We did not stop running until we came to the village proper.

Even being far from the open spaces of the fields we were still within the sphere of bombardment. When we reached the village proper it was deserted, no people or animals were

seen. Looking around we noticed a little shelter .We listened carefully to make sure that nobody was inside. It was quiet; no sounds of voices were heard. So we decided to go inside to find some protection from the exploding bombs. One could imagine our bewilderment seeing a young man sitting on a bench. It was too late to retreat, so we greeted him and sat down on the bench. We were completely exhausted. Our faces were not pale anymore but flushed from heat and running. The man observed us intensively, scrutinizing us from the head to the heels. We felt uncomfortable under his examining look. Our group looked suspicious, with dirty and wrinkled clothes. My brothers were unshaven and we were barefoot, because we lost our shoes during running from bombing. At one point he asked us: From where have you come? My brother Leo made up a story that we came from another village. My brother's story did not sound believable. We did not look like peasants. He certainly recognized that were Jews, because he said to us that he was a democrat and he lived in the United States for some time. His words indicated that he knew who we were but obviously wanted to let us know that he would not denounce us. This time we were lucky again to meet a decent man. But being caught in this kind of situation we felt uneasy and did not want to prolong our stay there any longer. We could not trust him even he was a seemingly decent person. Besides, another person could join him. We said to the young man goodbye and in a hurry left the shelter. The young Pole did not stop us.

And again we ran the roads. Question arose where to run. Suddenly we noticed a young German running. We thought that he was may be one of the German soldiers who came to our farmer's house to set up a military post and he was looking for us. We rationalized that in order to install a military position they must destroy the stable and found the hiding place, where we stayed at first when we came to our farmers to hide. We remembered that we left a Jewish prayer book

inside. We were convinced that they found it and realized that we were Jews in hiding, not owners of the farm. We experienced some frightening moments but to our relief the German soldier did not run after us but in a completely different direction. Our reasoning was false; our wild imagination played games with us. Some our fears were exaggerated, but others were realistic based on concrete and accurate dangerous situations and occurrences. But one could not blame us for being neurotic and at many times irrational. Living for so many years in constant tension and fear had modified our psyche.

We were extremely tired and our physical strength was completely exhausted and we could not run anymore. We dragged our achy legs and we suffered from dehydration, our mouths were dry and burning. We noticed a house standing alone not far away. We came closer and looked inside. There was only an old woman and a little child. We wondered why they stayed home when everyone left the houses. But this was not really our business. Because we were not afraid of an old woman or a child so we went inside and asked the woman for water. She did not ask any questions but gave us water. Nothing in the world could be compared to the taste of this cold water. We drank and drank and felt renewed. The old lady saved us from dehydration. When we saw how nice she was my brother took courage to ask her for a razor to shave. Also this time she did not ask any questions only she gave them a razor. My brothers shaved themselves. It was hard to guess what was she thinking. Did she recognize that we were Jews? But one was sure that she took pity seeing a group of people being in distress. We were thankful for her kindness. We left the house a little refreshed. But we still were tired and we had no strength left to continue our running, even slow walking was out of question. We became oblivious to everything; we did not even react to hearing

the sounds of explosions. One thing was on our minds to sit down and to rest. Not faraway we spotted a small forest. With the last drop of strength we managed to reach the forest.

We sat down and caught our breath. The trees were growing some distance from one another, but still there was shade. We rested our aching legs and our bodies became cool sitting in the shade. But we did not enjoy our resting period for long. A young German soldier approached us and did not ask permission, but unconventionally joined us. He simply sat down beside us. He took out from his pocket a picture and looked at it. His behavior perplexed us. He was young, almost a teenager, in his early years. His blue eyes were so sad. He said to us that he was so young and he did not want to die. His young age was a good indication that the Germans at the end of the war mobilized kids. Then another soldier came and dragged him away, because he did not want to get up, or maybe he was injured and was weak. The soldier took him away by force.

After this encounter with the young German soldier we had a less pleasant one with other soldiers. Two German soldiers unnoticed came from behind us, and turned to my brothers saying: get up dirty Poles and come with us. They were losing the war and probably they wanted to take revenge by killing Poles. It was sure they did not have good intentions. Of course they did not suspect that we were Jews. Scared to death we girls started to cry, pleaded with them to have mercy, kissing their hands to let our brothers stay. I did not remember in what language we spoke to them, Polish or German. One of the soldiers a soft hearted one, obviously moved by our despair said to the other: come comrade, let them stay. It was also a possibility that he had sisters at home in our age. Hesitatingly the other soldier complied and they left. We felt relieved but it took us some time to regain our selves. This was a very scary experience.

We looked around and we saw more and more single German soldiers or groups of soldiers marching through the forest. This picture was an indication that the Russians smashed German units and dispersed German soldiers were retreating or running away. Maybe some of the soldiers lost contact with their divisions and they trying to find and to join them, or could be deserters running away. We were delighted and high in spirit witnessing retreating German soldiers. But at the same time we realized that remaining in the forest could expose us to the repetition of the former frightening encounter with the two German soldiers, but with a tragic outcome. It was very convenient to sit in the shade and to avoid meeting returning home peasants. But our reason dictated us to be cautious and not to give in to the weakness and the urge to remain in the forest. We had to leave this forest right away not to gamble with fire. Ironically we could be killed not as Jews but as Poles. The Germans could not distinguish between a Jew and Pole.

In hurry we left the forest and started our new voyage to an unknown destination. Rested in the forest we regained our strength a little. Again we walked and walked this time we did not run, because there was not heavy bombardment, anymore. It was silent only from time to time we heard some explosions. But the sounds were not loud anymore. The problem was that we did not know where to go. It looked like the village was not under aircraft attack anymore. From a far we saw single peasants walking. This was a clear indication that some peasants were returning home. But seeing peasants even from a far made us very nervous. To be seen by the returning peasants put us again in a dangerous spot. Being recognized as Jews by peasants could have serious implications. It was enough that one of the peasants could be a Jew hater and denounce us to the retreating Germans. We had to take under consideration all these eventualities. We started to be worried. We

could not know for sure if the young Pole whom we met in the shelter did not mention us to others, or the old woman who gave us water did not say to others that a group of strangers, who looked like Jews were wandering around.

And again we were faced with a tense situation and we were not overreacting being so concerned about returning peasants, because we knew very well about the conduct of some Poles toward the Jews. It was obvious that we should to keep away from meeting peasants by any means. It was a tremendous risk to be in the view of the villagers. And we did not want to take this risk. There was only one thing to do in order to solve the problem of being seen by the villagers, namely to be again in a hiding place. We had a vague hope that the German soldiers left our farmers premises. Logically thinking we concluded that since the German soldiers were retreating en masse there was a strong possibility that the German soldiers on our farmers' premises left. We thought that it did not make sense that they should remain when others were retreating. It seemed to us that our reasoning was correct. So we decided to go back to our farmers house to find out what happened there. While walking toward our hiding place we looked around to make sure that nobody was walking. Luckily in this part of the village we did not see returning peasants and nobody was in the houses. When we came closer to our farmers' house we strained our ears to catch the slightest sound. But there was stillness, a complete absence of any sound or noise. We took courage to look inside the premises.

CHAPTER 31 We looked and looked and could not believe our eyes. It was too good to be true. There was not the slightest trace of the military installment. There were no more German soldiers. The only proof that the German soldiers stayed there were deep holes in the ground. How

fortunate we were to be again in our hiding place. We did not go to the attic, only we went to our first hiding place in the stable, in case of fire it was easier to escape from the stable than from the upstairs attic. The hiding place looked the same as when we left to go to the attic. All the personal belongings that we left were there. There was our prayer book. This prayer book which we wrongly thought the German soldiers found. We prayed and thanked G-d for saving us until now and to save in the future. How extremely glad we were not to be exposed to the hostile world to the danger of being seen by peasants. It was almost the end of the war and it would be a shame to be killed. We could not afford to trust anybody. Here in the dark hiding place we were safe. It felt so good to be in the smelly, dark place separated from the dangers of the outside world.

Very tired, completely burned out from excitement and fears of all the events which occurred to us all day long, we lay down on the straw that covered the ground of the stable. The straw remained from the time we were staying in the stable. This time the pungent smell of the cattle manure in the stable did not bother us at all. All day we did not eat, running from one place to another, while bombs were falling around, the last thing on our minds was food. We were not hungry only very thirsty because it was a very hot day, while we were running and perspiring our bodies got dehydrated. But now resting for a while in this dark stable, out of imminent danger and with increased prospects of survival we became hungry and thirsty. My sister Anna left the hiding place and went to the house of our farmers to look for some food. She found only some stale bread and water. We ate a piece of bread and drank water. It tasted very good and our hunger and thirst was partially satiated and eased our stomach pangs for food. Of course we ate it in darkness, for two reasons first we did not have a kerosene lamp to light, secondly even if we had it was not safe to light, since it was night and the light could be seen by someone passing the house.

We were tense and we had an intuition that shortly something would happen what would bring a change in our life. We were anxiously waiting and not sleeping. All night we listened with great intensity and concentration to the sounds coming from outside. The activity of airplanes flying over our place was increasing with every passing minute and noise was so loud that it was almost hurting our ears. This was a sign that the front must be very close and that the Russians were pushing back the German army. We sensed the war was in its last stage and that liberation was at the tip of the finger. But on the other side we were reasoning, that not until the war ended, one could not know what turn it could take. We also heard artillery shooting.

It was morning our eyes were burning us from lack of sleep and even we were sleepy we could not fall asleep from the tension. Suddenly we heard some voices and we became apprehensive. When the voices became louder it seemed to us that the language spoken was Russian. Anxiously we looked through the cracks between the boards of the stable wall, and we liked what we saw. We saw two Russian soldiers of very short statures. This was a patrol of soldiers sent on a reconnaissance mission to check the terrain to see that there were no Germans left. My brother explained to us the reason why the soldiers were so short. Short and slender soldiers were chosen for this kind of military operation because they were more agile and harder to spot.

We were exhilarated seeing these little Russian soldiers, and not believing our eyes. It was too rosy to be good. But this was reality not any dream. I pinched myself to convince myself that this was not a dream.

We saw light at the end of the tunnel of our deprived, miserable existence. These short Russian soldiers were messengers of our forthcoming freedom and liberation of Poland. In this moment of our intoxication we did not realize or predict what kind of trials and tribulation were laying ahead of us. It was not the last stop in our journey to freedom. Since there were no more Germans only the Russians, it was no use to stay any longer in the hiding place. So we came out from the stable. We felt a little shaky because we did not sleep all night. When we were ready to walk out from the premises unexpectedly Barbara appeared. She was crying being desperate not knowing what happened to her husband and children. She said that many people were injured or killed during the bombardment. During their escape from the village she got separated from her family and lost track of them. Between her sobs she was constantly repeating many, many times that she lost her husband, and her children, and that we where her only children left alive. We tried to console her and to persuade her not jump to conclusions. She calmed down. Now came time to take leave of her. Her coming back indicated that other villagers might also return home. We had to leave the premises as soon as possible because by staying there would put our farmers in a very embarrassing situation. Our presence there could easily reveal that they hid Jews and this fact would possess a potential of putting them in a difficult and unpleasant situation. We knew too well what was in general the attitude of Poles to the Jews. And besides the villages might envy them that they could have some financial profit for hiding Jews. In any case our presence was undesirable. We hugged her and kissed our savior Barbara and promised never to forget about them and to be in contact with them as fast as possible. Before our departure she gave us something to drink and some stale bread.

Chapter 32

We walked through the roads of the village and we were glad not to meet any peasants. The houses were still empty. We walked and walked and did not know where we were going. We came to the

outskirts of the village. We noticed a large number of Russian soldiers lodging on a large meadow. We were tired of walking so we sat on the grass to rest our bodies. Besides we felt safe being among Russian soldiers. We were naive not to know that being among soldiers during a war, especially for girls, was not safe. We did not realize that we girls were exposed to the danger of being raped. But because of a young Jewish soldier this misfortune was averted. A Russian soldier joined us. He spoke a little Ukrainian and some German, so he could converse with us. He told us that he was a medical doctor. He was very handsome with dark hair and eyes and we were sure that he was Jewish and he wanted us to believe that he was a Jew. When he left another young soldier came. But this one was Jewish though he looked like a typical Russian. Light skinned, with blue eyes and blond hair. He talked to us in Yiddish. He told us not to tell anybody in which house we would sleep overnight. The houses were empty and we could sleep in almost any one. He warned us not to trust the medical doctor, who was not Jewish but Armenian. He opened our eyes about the dangers of being raped. It was a war and hard to control the soldiers and some of them rape women. He left and promised to come to us in the evening and we told him in which house we would stay overnight. We went inside an empty house where we intended to stay to rest before starting our journey to another town or city under Russian sovereignty.

The Jewish soldier kept his word, in the evening he came to us. He brought us food, which was his supper. He talked with us. When he left we girls went to sleep in the attic and my brothers took away the ladder. This was a precaution in case some soldier seeing light might come into the house. We lay down on the straw and we fell asleep immediately. But in the middle of the night knocking at the front door awakened us. When we heard the knocking we froze in fear and instinctively covered ourselves with straw. My brother opened the door. On the step stood a young soldier who asked for a drink of water. My brother gave him water and when he finished drinking he left. After his departure we felt relieved. The rest of the night passed without any disturbance. Early in the morning the young Jewish soldier came to us. He turned out to be a security man in the army. His name was Shapiro. He took my brother Leo outside and had a very serious conversation with him. He asked him a lot of questions, our origin, our past, our upbringing and how we survived the war. He was listening and my brother gave him straight and correct answers. He liked what he heard. For security reasons he had to check out who were the people who stayed around his military units. This was war and one could not trust strangers. This was his responsibility to guard against espionage or sabotage. He said to my brother that for your good you must leave right away this

place. For two reasons First you could be accused of being spies, even you were innocent people. There was danger of being killed or in best case to be sent to some labor camp in Russia. Secondly the war was still going on, and in war one could not always know what might happen, what turn it might take. The Germans could push as back and return. This was not a warning but more an order. Though we were dead tired we had to leave this place. He gave us some money and a loaf of bread. We were sure that this was his daily ration. We had no choice but to start our journey to the unknown. Again we dragged our legs, barefoot because we lost our shoes while running during the bombardment. Every step on the pebbles hurt our feet, which were cut by the sharp edges of the stones. The day was very hot and the sun burned our faces. We were thirsty and my mouth was dried up. We walked on roads and we passed some villages.

We saw a great destruction everywhere. We saw burned houses, we saw burned trees, and we saw burned grains in the field. We did not meet any peasants walking on the roads. From time to time we heard explosions, or sporadic artillery fire. Every time we heard an explosion we trembled. It seemed to us that this was so close to us that we would be hit by a bomb. With each passing minute our thirst was more and more hard to endure. It was almost unbearable. My mouth was dry, burning without any saliva. When we passed a house where peasants were inside, my sister Anna took the courage and knocked at the door and when someone came out she begged for water and piece of bread. Sometimes a good --hearted person gave her water and a piece of bread. But many times they refused to give her anything. Water was for us more important than food. We walked and walked and had not the slightest idea where we were and did not know where we were going. When we spotted a stream we washed our faces and drank the water from the stream. After some hours of walking one road after another we came to a place where shelling started to be heavy and bombs were falling some distance ahead of us. This fact indicated that we came closer to the front. We became so apathetic and oblivious to everything that was going around, that even falling bombs did not arouse fear in us. We were totally passive and our minds stopped thinking. As robots we walked forward and forward. The little stones and pebbles which covered the roads were hurting our feet, but it was impossible to avoid stepping on them. From our impassiveness we were suddenly awakened by a noise of a military vehicle driven by a Russian soldier. The soldier was shouting from a far. So we stopped and the car approached us. The door was opened and one young Russian soldier asked us where were we going and proposed us to take us with them. His invitation startled us and seemed suspicious. Our explanation of the motives that stimulated the offer of the

young Russian soldier to drive us was a mere fantasy. We suspected that this soldier must be undercover military agent and that the young security officer, who interviewed my brother and asked us to leave, gave him an order to catch us and bring us back. Possibly that he thought that he made a mistake and we were spies, because we spoke German with the Armenian doctor. Of course our reasoning was ridiculous. We could not reject his invitation to an offer to drive us. The temptation was greater than our imaginary suspicion. We went inside the car. There were several Russian soldiers. They were young and very handsome and in a good mood. The stress of war was not shown on their faces. Maybe they were recruited to serve in the military not long ago and did not take part in any fighting, or their job was only security. The soldiers were very cordial and they knew some Ukrainian language and they could converse with us. It was obvious that we were completely wrong in our distrust.

They gave us two loaves of bread and a bottle of water. This was a precious gift, because we were hungry and thirsty, because we did not have anything to drink or to eat. We drank the water and we felt refreshed. The bread we saved to eat later and in small portions that it would last longer. It was splendid to drive in a vehicle and not to have to step on stones and pebbles. After a long drive with them we had to leave the vehicle because they went in a different direction. We asked them before leaving for a direction to a nearby town. They explained to my brothers how to reach a town and they had maps. We thanked them very much for their kindness and help and we departed. Now our destination was to reach a town. Before we walked aimlessly not knowing where we were and where we were going. But now we knew the directions to a town where there were no German soldiers anymore.

Now our goal was to find the town. We had a good rest in the vehicle and we had food to eat. We sat down on side of a road and ate a piece of bread and again we drank water that was warm. Our batteries were recharged and feeling energized we started again on our journey. We began to walk a little faster. But after a short time our energy diminished and once again our steps were slower and slower. It was a wonder that we could endure so much. Being so young helped us. Finally, almost at the end of our endurance, our legs almost refused to walk anymore when we reached a town. We read the sign: Kolbuszow.

We were so glad to be in a town. It was late evening but still there was light. We walked narrow streets. There were small wooden houses painted white, or some had other colors. Some of the houses showed the signs of war. There were some people strolling along at a leisurely pace. They looked at us with curiosity. We formed a very strange group, our faces blushed from the heat covered our unusual paleness of the skin of our faces, being for two years not exposed to light or beams of the sun. We were looking wild, barefoot with ragged clothes. We did not expect sympathy while looking at us a picture of misery and pity and we did not care. It was not doubt that they right away recognized us as being Jews who came out from hiding. We felt some hostility toward us. They made some nasty remarks. We did not react to this. We were any more afraid that they might denounce us to the Germans. There were no more Germans. There were friendly Russians who came to liberate Poland from the German tyranny. How comforting was the realization of this fact. We were free. They wondered how it happened that there were some Jews still alive. We did not give a damn if they were disappointed. We did not react to these unfavorable remarks but unfavorable remarks and walked undisturbed. Our thoughts were concentrated on one thing where would we find lodging. We did not have the slightest idea how to find a place to sleep. We looked around and we were observing our surroundings. After a while of walking and searching unexpected we noticed an empty, wrecked house with broken glass in the windows, the paint was peeled off. This abandoned house probably once was occupied by Jews who were taken away. Why nobody occupied this house and fixed it was hard to guess. But this was not our problem.

We were glad to find an empty house where to stay for a while and rest our bones. We were weary, every bone in our bodies was sore and hurting us, most of all our legs, which were bruised from walking barefoot on stones and pebbles. Our faces were inflamed and burning from exposure to the sun. My sister face was very swollen, as a bad reaction to the sun, her eyes could hardly been seen. First thing what we did was to sit down to catch our breath. We even had not the strength to talk.

When we rested we looked around. We were pleased with what we found. Inside the apartment we find some treasures: namely a knife spoons, a plate, some broken pots and pans. And there was a stove, still in a usable state. There stood a broken table and chairs. We found ourselves in a luxurious dwelling, or so it seemed to us. You have to consider that it was the first time after two years of not experiencing the pleasure of sitting on a chair. We sat on a chair. For the first time

we could cook our own meal, we had a stove and kitchen utensils, though a little rusted and broken but still usable. It was one small problem we did not have anything to cook. Water we brought from the well, fire my brother made using stones by rubbing them, the way primitive people did. He found some wood, which we used to make fire in the stove.

My brother went to the fields nearby and brought some straw which we spread on the floor and prepared a convenient place to sleep. It was much better to sleep on the straw than naked ground. Everything was arranged in order; now the problem remained of from where to get food. But this problem my brothers solved promptly without any hesitation. To survive and not to die from starvation one had to lower his principles and to break one of the Ten Commandments: do not steal. Had we any other choice. Could we ask some Polish people for help, witnessing their unfriendliness? Would not it be a shame to die at the end of the war from starvation? We hoped that G-d would forgive us for aberration from our moral standards. Late in the` night when the town was asleep and the farmers were in deep sleep my brothers ventured into the fields and managed to dig out some vegetables, such as carrots, potatoes and to pick cabbage, cucumbers and corn. They took only a very small quantity and from different farmers so in this way the farmers would not notice that someone was stealing vegetables from their farm.

My brothers nightly escapades were successful they came back unnoticed by anybody and loaded with vegetables in their pockets, inside the shirts, in every place possible and in their hands, providing us with food for a couple of days. My sisters boiled the potatoes and cooked cabbage, corn and carrots and we had a feast after several days of diet on pieces of bread and water. We drank boiled water. We had a restful night falling asleep, right away, being tired and exhausted from tension, anxieties and hardships that we experienced in the last several days. In the morning when I opened my eyes at first I did not know where I was. But momentarily I realized with great pleasure that we were free, and had a place to stay and sleep.

We stayed all the time inside the apartment resting and the first time for a long time we washed ourselves with warm water. We used sand to scrap the dirt from our hands, because we did not have any soap. Refreshed we felt much better. After two days or more some Jews who came out from different hiding places appeared in our house to join us. We were pleased to have company. Someone told them that some Jews were in this house. The next couple of days other arrived. There was a grandfather with grandchild and two sons. The grandchild was a little kid and the two

sons were young men. There was a married couple and there were several young unmarried men. Every one had had a different story to tell how miraculously they survived. We talked and talked sharing our experiences.

Rumors started to spread in the town about Jews who came out from the holes, as they described our hiding places. And again they were surprised that some Jews were still alive. There was no sympathy toward us whatsoever in this little town. These rumors of Jews in this little, broken house reached the Jewish soldiers in the Russian army. How happy they were to see some surviving Jews. When they visited us they kissed us and showed their affection and concern. They brought us bread and their portions of food. They were astonished hearing our stories and these soldiers, hardened in the war, to whom death was not a stranger and who saw so many people killed in fighting, had tears in their eyes hearing about the fate of Jews and their tortures.

This time even we did not have much to do the time was going fast. We had company and we were free people. But we did not explore the city but rather stayed home. One day I got sick with high fever. My face got swollen on both sides. We did not know what kind of sickness this was. There was in the town a military doctor so I went to be examined. When I came I found out that the doctor was a young Russian woman who took care of the sick Russian soldiers. After checking my face she said that I have mumps. How I got this sickness I did not know, I was not in contact with any sick children since this was a contagious illness. She was very polite she gave me some cotton to wrap my face but did not have any medication to give me. They were short of everything; they did not have even aspirin. I came home not relieved from my discomfort, but at least I knew what kind of sickness I had. I wrapped my face with additional rags to keep warm and I drank hot water to keep down my fever. Several days I suffered not having any drugs to ease my pain or to lower my high temperature. I lay on the straw and rested all day and nature took its course. The worst was that I could not sleep during the night because it bothered me the most during the night. After several days I got better without taking any drugs. It took several days more until I completely recovered.

The days went eventless helping us to regain some strength. We did not know when we would leave this town. But unexpectedly some event took place, which could have a tragic outcome. This event prompted us to leave this place and to look for another town. A Jewish soldier who was told about Jews who survived came to pay us a visit. He was a young, handsome man in

his thirties, married with one child. He told us about his family, his worries about them not knowing what happened to them. He lived in Romania. He left his wife and child to serve in the Russian army. And we told him about our past and our life in hiding. We talked and talked not realizing that it was very late. Since his job was to deliver oil to the front he had to get up very early in the morning. It was very late after midnight so he decided to stay in our house overnight because it did not pay for him to go back to his military quarters.

So he said to us that he would like to sleep in our apartment overnight and early morning to go straight to deliver oil to the front. We put some straw on the floor and he lay down and covered himself with a military coat. We all went to sleep. In the early morning we were awakened by a terrible noise and shouting. Perplexed we wondered what happened. We heard strong knocking and pounding at the door and hostile voices cursing and yelling. You dirty Jews from which hole did you crawl out? We are going to kill all of you. And they started to break the door. The Jewish soldier opened the door. Standing at the door was Polish police. They did not expect to see a Russian soldier who would spoil their fun game with Jews. Seeing a Russian soldier they became bewildered and momentarily changed their behavior. The Jewish soldier started to yell at them; You sons of a bitch what do you want. Why did you come to disturb people's sleep? They became mild as sheep and started to apologize, saying that they came to take the men to dig ditches. When they knocked at the door my brothers managed to hide themselves in the cellar which was in the kitchen. The top of the cellar we covered with straw and we sat on the top. Houses in small towns used to have cellars in the kitchen. The policemen took several young men disregarding they were weak being for so long in hiding places. They returned in the evening tired from a day's work. Taking the young men to work was a pretext for coming to us. They wanted to cover the real purpose of coming to our house. Why were they cursing us and threatening that they were going to kill us. If not of the presence of the Jewish soldier they would rape us and killed. Nobody would know about this. Maybe my brothers hidden in the cellar would survive. But even this was not so sure because they knew that there was a cellar in the kitchen and the straw that covered the top of the cellar did not conceal the entrance.

The truth was that this Jewish soldier saved our life. Merely by lucky circumstances we survived this time. Was this a coincidence that was very late and he decided to stay overnight in our place or was this our good luck and destiny to survive again. This event could cause the end of our lives at the end of the war. A good angel again watched over us.

CHAPTER 34

After this occurrence we were afraid to remain in this hostile town. This experience told us that it was not safe to stay there. Though we would like to stay a little longer in this house and to regain our strength before walking again to another town. But we could not afford to take a chance to remain in this house. We could not be sure if the policemen would not come again. But in this time there would not be a Jewish soldier to protect us. Reluctantly we left the house as well as the rest of the survivors. We departed from them and said goodbye to them. We started again our journey into the unknown, because we did not know where we would wind up. Our aim was to reach another town. We dragged again our legs, walking the main roads not to get lost. Also in this time we did not meet anybody on the roads. We were very careful not to step on broken glass, or stones with which the roads were covered. But one could not avoid stepping accidentally on a stone or even glass. We had blisters and some cuts on our feet and this was painful but we disregarded it and continued to walk. The scene was the same as before some houses burnt and the grain in the fields ruined. This time we had something to eat and we had a bottle with water, which we took with us when leaving Kolbuszow. Also in this time we heard the noise of falling bombs. It was frightening because we could be in a sphere of bombardment. After many hours of burdensome walking we reached a town. We read the sign: Mielec. We walked through the town, which was larger than Kolbuszow. More populated nicer houses. Here the scenario repeated once more. Polish people looking at us with curiosity. No wonder we looked strange, looking at us, it was easy to figure out that we were Jews who came out from a hiding place. But the people were more sympathetic than in Kolbuszow. They seemed less hostile, one could even see in the expression of their faces pity looking at our miserable figures. One man even offered us information that the owner of a mill in this town survived and returned to his house. He gave us his address and told us in which direction to go to find his house. We thanked him for his information. We found the place where the owner of the mill lived. We talked to him, he was glad to see surviving Jews but he could not help us too much because he just returned and he did not have anything besides his house. He gave me shoes what was very important for me. Walking without shoes was very inconvenient. But one good thing happened by our coming to this place. In the vicinity of this house was standing a barracks in the garden which consisted of one room. A young Polish couple occupied this barracks. It happened that this couple was moving out to countryside for a period of

time and taking pity on us offered the of their apartment for the time of their absence. How lucky we were to have a place to stay. We were so thankful for their kindness and compassion. After the bad experiences in Kolbuszow this was heart warming seeing sympathy toward us.

This room was furnished. There was a bed, table, chairs, a stove and kitchen utilities, pots and pans, knife, spoons, plates. They left everything that was essential for daily living. We had everything, we had a stove to cook but we were lacking product for cooking. But we had hot boiled water to drink. Some Polish neighbors gave us some food. One day came to us a young boy who knew us from Debica. My brother met him in the street. He was surprised seeing my brother and right away came to us. He survived in a forest with some other Jews. He also went through a rough time and one can say miraculously stayed alive. He helped as a little.

We could wash ourselves with hot water and we found a piece of soap. We took off our clothes and washed them and dried in the sun. While the clothes were drying out we were naked inside the room covered with a blanket which the owners left. It was a hot day and the clothes dried out very fast. How pleasant it was to put on clean clothes. I felt like I was a princess. The clothes smelled so good.

One evening my brother Leo got sick, he had a bad case of diarrhea. While going to the lavatory which was located in the garden he fainted. Someone noticed him lying unconscious on the ground. It was very scary, as there was no doctor. After a while he came back to senses. We did not have any medication to give him for his diarrhea, and he was bleeding. We did not have any light food to give him to eat. A Polish neighbor felt sorry for him and for several days until he got better was bringing him food. He recovered thank to this good -hearted woman.

Luck continued to stay with us. One day a Russian Jewish soldier, whose division stationed in Mielec not far from our apartment, came to us. He was the manager of the magazine, which provided food products for the army. He was born in Russia, but he knew a little Yiddish language so he could converse with us. He was so happy to meet Jewish survivors and we were happy to meet him. He provided us with provisions, which lasted for a long time. He gave us flour, sugar, various grains, salt etc. now we had food to cook and to eat. He saved us from starving. He was so good to us. He gave me his military coat. He was listening to our stories with great interest. He was young as most of the Jewish soldiers whom we met. He did not know where his family was during the war` they were evacuated from the town where they lived, when the German army was approaching Leningrad.

We were sad when he left Mielec with his division. We thanked him from the bottom of our hearts for his compassion and generosity.

We met some Jewish survivors. One of them was a young girl saved by an old, illiterate peasant. She decided to stay with him, she could not leave him because he saved her life and she felt some moral obligation to remain with him. She helped us in some way giving us milk every day. Looking at her face one could see that she was not happy. How could she be, knowing that she lost all her family? We got acquainted with two Jewish women, one was very young and the other was middle aged. A Polish couple hid them. The sad story was that the man abused them both, forcing them to have sexual relations. He took advantage of their dependence on him, and they could not tell his wife because he warned them that the consequences would be harmful to them. So they had no choice but to take his advances in submission. Every one whom we met had different stories to tell how they survived, but one thing they had in common, that many times they were in critical situations and the smallest wrong move could have turned into a disaster. Many people tried to escape and hide but did not succeed. Chances for survival were diminished by the hostility of the population.

Nobody would ever know how many Jews who tried to hide perished and in what circumstances they died. Nobody would never know their suffering or witness the fear in their eyes at the last moment of their life. Nobody would know who killed them or who denounced them to the German authorities. These responsible for the heinous, criminal acts would never be punished for their criminal acts.

Not far from us a Russian military command headquarters was located. It was Yom Kippur the holiest day in the Jewish religion. A group of Jewish soldiers came to visit us. They asked us for permission to pray in our room. We gladly agreed but we did not have for them a prayer book for this holiday. They also asked us not mention to their commander that they prayed. We promised them not to say anything about this to their commander who was a major or even had

a higher rank. He used also to come to us and to talk to us. He was a very friendly man.

The Jewish soldiers were afraid that they would have some problems when he would know that they were observing the Jewish holiday.

In Russia religion was outlawed and practicing religion was punishable. They did not trust the Major. Knowing that he was an atheist and besides he was blindly following the Russian code of law. To be on the sure side they locked themselves in the room and to our surprise one of the young soldiers knew the prayers by heart. It was a puzzle as to how and when the young man learned this by heart. What kind of memory did he have to remember every word? This was amazing that a young man in a communist country was interested to learn Jewish tradition and it was puzzling how he got prayer books.

The other soldiers were listening with devotion to his reciting the Hebrew prayers. Of course we did not mention to the major about their observance of Yom Kippur.

The major was a very interesting character and a little mysterious. We did not know for sure what nationality he was. We suspected that he was Jewish but he did not offer any clue while conversing with us to tell us that he was a Jew. But there were some signs that supported our suggestion. Was his interest in us, his concern and emotional reaction seeing surviving Jews, not an indication? When he left Mielec he gave us all his clothes, even his shirt which he was wearing. When we did not want to accept it he got angry and said in that case he would give it to the Poles. Hearing this we took his gift and thanked him warmly. We were moved by his generosity. This was a great help to us. My sister sold his clothes and we had some money that came in very handy later.

CHAPTER 35

It was late fall 1944. The war was approaching to its successful conclusion for the allied forces, but severe fighting was still going on. The Germans were retreating on all fronts and more

and more places were liberated. Germans were still bombing cities inflicting great destruction and many casualties. During one night the bombardment of Mielec was severe. Loud explosion followed one after another. The sky was red from fire. Our barrack was shaking from detonations. It was like an earthquake. The bombs were falling very close to our place. It was too dangerous to remain in the house. The house, which stood not far from us, was a brick building, which had several floors and had a shelter. In a hurry we ran out from our apartment. The bombs were falling and we were lucky not to be hit by them. Out of breath and frightened we reached the shelter. Inside there were all tenants from this building as from other houses. Nobody made any remarks seeing us, everyone was sitting quietly and trembling from fear and praying to God not be hit by falling bombs. This was a terrible night. All night bombs were falling. We did not know how this would end. If a bomb would destroy this building we could be buried underneath and die. Every time a bomb was falling and explosion followed a panic gripped my throat. In the morning the bombing stopped and there was a lull from fighting.

We left the shelter and went back to our apartment. We were pale from the night's frightening experience and our eyelids were swollen from a sleepless nights. We were sleepy but we could not fall asleep. We were too nervous and excited.

The result of the nightly bombardment was horrible. A number of people were killed, many injured and some houses were destroyed. What saddened us the most was the news that a young girl who had survived the war by being hidden by a old peasant was killed during the bombardment. We did not want to be exposed to new bombardment. We knew that we have to leave this place not because of the danger of being killed by hostile police as it was case in Kolbuszow. Here we met sympathy from the Polish neighbors and we felt

safe. But this time the danger of being killed by bombs was the reason why we decided to leave Mielec as fast as possible. We heard that Rzeszow was a more safer place, that there was no bombardment. But to go there was not such a simple thing. It was too far away and we could not walk. There was also an additional reason to go to Rzeszow. Rzeszow was a larger town and we expected to find more surviving Jews.

My brother Leo made a decision that he would go by himself and to find o conditions in Rzeszow. The next day he left and we were waiting for a message from him. How my brother managed to reach Rzeszow was a puzzle. How he knew the directions to the town, how he knew which roads led to the town Rzeszow. But we did not elaborate, in this moment the important fact was that he arrived in one piece in the town Rzeszow. But more astonishing was that he found an empty apartment, partially destroyed by bombs on the main street of Rzeszow, 3 Maja. But some rooms remained undamaged and could be used to live in. After achieving this, my brother came back to us to prepare for our leaving to Rzeszow. This was not an easy task to carry out. We had to have some kind transportation. There were no trains or cars, only one kind of transportation was left, a wagon driven by horses. But we found some obstacles. We could not find any coachman willing to drive us in this dangerous time to Rzeszow. The roads were bad, and the bombs were falling. We thought that we had to give up our plans. But in the last minute we found a man who agreed to drive us to Rzeszow. Of course we paid him with the money which we saved from selling the clothes of the Russian Major. The money came in handy. So we were again on move. We said goodbye to our neighbors and thanked them their kindness. We could not thank the young couple who gave us their room to stay, because they were still away.

The journey to Rzeszow was a rough one. The bombs were still falling and every sound of

explosion froze the blood in our veins. We traveled along roads, which were full of holes, bumpy, and our wagon was shaking and we were jumping up and down in our seats. We traveled through forest and our driver thought that this would be safer. But the explosions did not stop; the sound of them was deafening our ears, because the bombs were falling in close vicinity. We saw a picture of destruction wherever we traveled, burnt houses, burned trees, and overturned trees blackened from the fire. To travel in this kind of condition was an experience as being in hell. Our driver was mad why he did such a stupid thing as to agree to drive us. We were worried that he might be discouraged and would make a turn back to Mielec. We offered to pay him a little more when we arrived in Rzeszow. But after some time of driving, with every mile farther from Mielec and closer to Rzeszow the intensity of bombardment was diminishing and finally stopped completely.

Our good fortune did not abandoned us, whole and unhurt we arrived in Rzeszow. Many, many times we could be killed by falling bombs, merely by mere luck we came out from this journey unharmed. And again a good angel watched over us all the way along and brought us safe to Rzeszow. We paid our coachman and wished him a safe return home.

CHAPTER 36

Now in Rzeszow we started a new page in our wandering after leaving the hiding place. Rzeszow was a bigger town in comparison to the two other towns where we were before, namely Kolbuszow and Mielec. Our apartment was on the main street of the town. On the main street there were many stores with all kind of merchandise. A lot of people were walking in the street. The city was quiet, there was not noise of falling bombs. Nobody looked at us when we went to our

apartment. The apartment was empty. Probably it was occupied by Germans who fled taking with them everything. There were no beds, the undamaged rooms were completely empty, only in the kitchen which was not damaged was a table and chairs and a stove and kitchen utilities. We did not have many things to unpack. My brothers brought straw, which we spread on the floor in one of the rooms. Once it was a beautiful, large apartment with many rooms. But now some of the rooms were completely damaged from bombing, the walls were broken, the glass in the windows was missing. It was even dangerous to be inside these rooms. But there were enough rooms in good condition to live in.

We were so fortunate to have an apartment, a place where to sleep and where to cook. Our conditions of life improved much. It was the first night that we could sleep undisturbed a whole night. Sounds of explosion did not awake us up. We felt very comfortable sleeping on straw on the floor. We were not hungry anymore. First time after two years I ate a piece of cake and we had meat to eat. There was a big market a place where people bought and sold all kind of merchandise. One could get cans of meat sold by Russian soldiers, dairy products, fruits, vegetables, sold by peasants, bread, cakes, clothes, in one word a variety of merchandise was spread on stands. The market was crowded, noisy; one wanted to outcry the other. The sellers in loud voices advertised their products.

The atmosphere in the market had for me an exciting flavor. Noise meant life, activity. I was yearning while in the hiding place for sounds and voices of human beings. Stillness, I mean a complete stillness is a sign of death. There does not exist a complete stillness in nature

On the market one could see a lot of Russian soldiers selling and buying. This market was a source of our income that provided us with food. My sister got a small amount of money I hardly

remember how she got it, possibly it was money left from selling the Russian major's clothes, with this small amount of money she bought something and latter sold with a profit. My brother Leo and my sister Anna used to go to the market every day and became dealers. They made enough money to provide the family with food and to buy some old clothes, such as shoes and old dresses for us girls and pants and shirts for my brothers. First time after more than two years we had an unlimited amount of food.

My sister was selling to the Russian soldier's whisky or cigarettes in exchange for cans of meat. The Russian soldiers were almost crazy about whisky and would sell everything to get a hold of a bottle of whisky. They were so addicted to alcohol that in case they could not get it they would even drink cologne. The scent of cologne did not bother them. I remember when being in hiding place we wondered if it would come a time that we could eat bread as much as we wanted. We got stronger being better nourished, my brothers hair on his face grew back and our pale faces got a healthier coloring.

The days were no more monotonous and they were passing with a faster pace. I was not bored anymore. What did I do all day? I did not do anything special. Merely walking the streets gave me a great pleasure. I never was tired walking long hours. I was walking at a leisurely pace, observing and wondering as a small child who was happy discovering new things. I liked to walk along the busy streets full of activity. People were walking, some very fast and some slowly. There were stores with appealing merchandise. There were on the show windows displayed cookies, cakes, chocolate and other delicacies. There was not the slightest sign that a war was still going on.

The city of Cracow, where we lived before the war, was not free, still under the German occupation. I enjoyed looking at the window displays even I could not afford to buy anything. I had

such a good feeling to walk free in the streets not to be afraid of the passing Poles, not to be frightened when they looked at me. I was not scared anymore that someone would denounce me or kill me. There was police; there was Russian authority. The Russians were seen all over the streets. But the most precious thing that I gained by being free was that I could talk loud, scream laugh and sing. I did not have to sit quietly in one place. I could walk and we could run. People usually take for granted all these activities, which are part of their daily living. But my family and I were deprived of all of these activities for two years.

Sometimes I had an urge to scream loud that I was free. Only a person who experienced the same that we did could understand our feeling of happiness to be free again. Being in Kolbuszow and Mielec we had many problems, which prevented me from enjoying fully all the pleasures of being a free person. Almost all the time I was staying inside the room to avoid meeting people. There was a perennial fear in Kolbuszow; there was heavy bombardment in Mielec.

But now no eminent danger was threatening. I had food to eat a place to sleep, and was not afraid that someone would knock at the door cursing us. I could walk in the street and not hear hostile remarks. I could wash myself every day with hot water and soap. I fully realized what a blessing was to have freedom and not to have to hide.

One could imagine my satisfaction when I went to a dressmaker who sawed me a suit from the military coat, which I got as a present from a Jewish soldier in Mielec. The fabric was coarse and heavy but I thought this suit was the most elegant outfit. The weather started to be a little cooler and this outfit was very practical.

In Rzeszow we had no personal contacts with Poles except with a young woman who lived next to our apartment. I used to visit her and talk to her. I was longing to have some company and to talk someone. She was very pretty, but simple, and ignorant and did not know the most basic

facts of life. But she was a good and warm person and I liked her. She made a proposition too tempting to reject, that I could sleep in her room with her, she had a separate bed for me. In her apartment there were staying some Russian soldiers and she was afraid to sleep by herself. I was so delighted to be able to sleep in a bed, which was comfortable, so soft and I had clean nice blankets to cover myself. After sleeping for such a long time on the ground, on straw, hay and on floor covered with straw it felt so good and I thought that I was a princess sleeping in such a fancy bed.

The Russian soldiers used to lodge in private houses. Sometimes the soldiers stayed for one night or two, or sometimes they stayed longer, depending on their mission. The town was a transit point for soldiers. The Russian Commendary used to assign to them private houses where they could stay. They stayed in our damaged apartment too.

One day a group of young Russian soldiers arrived. They did not mind at all that in our apartment there were no beds and that they had to sleep on the floor. They stayed for several days. After their departure another group of soldiers came. It started to get lively in our apartment. One could hear their laughter; they cooked, fried meat and drank whisky in great quantities. They started the meal with vodka and they finished the meal with vodka. What was amazing they were never drunk only merry. They laughed a lot, and they sang and joked. They behaved correctly in our house and they were respectful. The young soldiers were friendly, even inviting us to dine with them. They did not take no for an answer. They used to bring a lot of food and we shared meals with them. Of course they saw that we were poor and evidently felt sorry for us.

I picked

up a lot of Russian words and was even able to converse with them. Though they had respect for us girls, we did not trust them without reservation. They were soldiers with guns and this was still wartime. So when my sisters went to sleep at nighttime to their room they locked the doors inside. But it never happened that they tried to get into their room, or tried to abuse them sexually. They behaved as gentlemen and showed good manners. This was not a front where there were no women. In this town it was easy to have a woman, there were a lot of young women who for money would do everything. There were also prostitutes.

The young Russian soldiers had many stories to tell. We met very interesting characters of young people. They told us about their heroic deeds, they told us macabre stories. How much truth was in their stories one could not know, but they were exciting and fascinating. It was obvious that they wanted to impress us by showing how brave they were. But it did not matter for me if the stories were true or false, I had fun listening. It really did not make any difference to me if they exaggerated a little. Of course I pretended that I believed without any reservation in the credibility of their stories. I liked to listen to their sentimental Russian songs full of melancholy, longing and love.

Once there came a group of soldiers who were a special breed. They took out from their pockets a great amount of money, Polish money and Russian money and started to tear up the money. We ask the leader of this group why were they doing it. He explained that they tried to find out which money was stronger and which was easier to tear up. This would be a proof which money had a greater value. They were foolish and they simply played. Their behavior aroused in us some suspicion and we wondered how they got so much money. Were they deserters and robbing people in the streets. They behaved in our place correctly, they very friendly to us, especially their leader who was very handsome. Tall, slim, blond with dark blue

eyes. It was a pleasure to look at his angelic face. He told us that his mother was Jewish and he considered himself being Jewish. He gave us a lot of food. His name was Lenka. Looking at his innocent, young face I could not imagine that he could rob somebody.

While walking in the streets my brother Leo met a friend of our family, who lived in Cracow. My brother brought him to our apartment and because he just came out from hiding he had no place to stay so we proposed to him to stay with us. There was enough room for more people. From time to time different surviving Jews used to come to our apartment to sleep overnight. This family friend survived in the forest. He was worrying about his wife and little son with whom he got separated and lost trace of. He did not know if they were alive. So he stayed with us.

Life in Rzeszow seemed to us as heaven compared to our life in hiding, or even in Kolbuszow or Mielec. It is true that my family slept on straw on the floor, that in the apartment was no electricity that we lit a kerosene lamp. In the evening I liked to draw faces of the Russian soldiers. I did not have any books to read and I did not miss them. Evenings in our apartment were lively never boring. Soldiers were singing; survivors were visiting us, and sharing with us their nerve - racking experiences. There was a lot of talking about the war and the advances of the Allies and the defeat of the German army, which once was considered at the mighty and indestructible military power. Every day there was news, which was spreading as if on the wings of birds. People were waiting for the end of the war.

Even in this tranquil time when seemed that everything was going well for us we were not spared from a scary event. Usually there were soldiers in our apartment in the evening, but this time my family was only home. We were sitting at the table in the kitchen, only in this room was a table and chairs, the other rooms were empty, only straw was spread on the floors. The door was

not locked, because we never locked the door, even when we were leaving the apartment. There was nothing worthy to be stolen. The door was opened and a Russian soldier came in. It was nothing unusual, because we were used to seeing soldiers come to sleep over night. But this time it was a different case. The soldier pointed the gun at my brother Sam and said to him come with me. We were stunned we could not figure out why he was taking him away and why he choose him over other members of our family.

He had a gun and my brother had to obey his order. After they left we were frightened what might happen to him. Hastily we were thinking what to do; where to go for help: to the Russian Military Headquarters, or to the police. One had to remember that the war was still going on and was not permitted for private people to walk at nighttime. There was a curfew, and all the windows had to be covered with black paper or heavy curtain not to allow the light to be seen. Our hands were bound and we were helpless.

Next to our apartment, on the same floor a high ranking Russian military man lived with a Polish girl. He looked Jewish, but we were not sure about his nationality. Usually Jewish soldiers took some interest in meeting surviving Jews. But he was different, he never even noticed us. I took courage, went to him and told him what happened. I cried, kissed his hands and begged him to save my brother. At first he did not want to help me, he did not want to interfere, he was not at all moved seeing my despair. Besides there was a party going on, they were dancing, drinking and enjoyed themselves. May be he did not want to be disturbed. I was desperate and in a state of hopelessness that I hardly could control my conduct. I did something unreasonable. I totally forgot that there was curfew and one could be even shot being outside. I ran outside the house to see where the Russian soldier was taking my brother. There was a complete darkness. The streets were deserted; not one living soul was outside. I was standing and

trembling being helpless, not knowing what to do. Then I heard steps behind me. I turned my head and there was the Russian officer approaching. I did not expect him to come. Had he changed his mind and now was willing to help us? He was mad with me and started to yell at me. He ordered me to go home right away. He told me that I am completely out of my mind to go out. He reminded me that there was in effect a curfew and that one could be shot on the spot. He assured me that he was going to look for my brother Sam, and that he was going to see what happened to him. I was overjoyed hearing his promise of trying to find out what happened to him. I went home and he went to look for him.

I came home but my family did not even know that I ran out from the house when he refused to help us. They thought that I was still talking to the Russian officer. We waited impatiently for the return of the officer and to hear if he found my brother. After a period of nerve breaking waiting the officer came with good news. He spotted my brother walking with the Russian soldier, who presumably was drunk. He stopped the soldier and asked him where he was taking my brother. What kind of explanation he gave we did not know. But he had taken my brother to jail. The officer walked them to the jail to be sure that the soldier did not kill him. When my brother was put in the jail the officer left.

In the morning my brother was released from jail and he came home. If not of the help of the Russian officer the soldier who was drunk would not take him to the jail but he would kill him presumably for no reason. It was impossible to figure out if he planned to come to our house or because the door was open he accidentally walked in and he took my brother Sam because he did not like his looks. This was only our guess. It was of no use trying to find a logical explanation of his behavior. What was important that my brother was alive and

together with us? Once again a dangerous situation, in the chain of many others, turned out to have a happy ending.

CHAPTER 37

After this frightening event our lives returned to normalcy. There were no more bad experiences while staying in Rzeszow. Life was passing uneventfully, we felt secure. Our attention was completely concentrated in following the news about the war. Though it was the last convulsions of the war but as long a war was going on always some unpredicted complications could occur. Cracow was not yet liberated. We waited impatiently for the happy conclusion of the fighting and prayed to God that peace would come soon. Not only we waited for the end of the war; this was on everyone's mind. We were now not outcasts but part of the city's population. Though we lived in worse conditions than others did we were free and could freely move without being afraid of others to be denounced or even killed.

My family was busy to finding means of providing us with food and the basic necessities of life. I was not involved in this matter so I had plenty of time on my hands I continued to walk the streets, observing people, and watching the store window show where different merchandise was displayed. How delicious was the cookie or ice-cream, which I bought. After two years of being confined to a quiet and dim place, sitting all day almost motionlessly, and being allowed only to whisper, the bright light, the city noise and pulsing with activities made me feel good and alive. But the overwhelming feeling of happiness when we for the first time went out from the hiding place and became once again free people lost some degree of intensity.

After a period of time I got used to the fact of being free and started to yearn for more, just the fact of being able to move freely and to talk loud and to eat as much I had a desire was not now enough for me. I felt that something is missing in my life and I started to have more expectations from life. I was dreaming of having a complete normal life, to be able to return to my home,

namely Cracow, to be able to go to school, to have friends. I was thinking a lot about my town Cracow and how happy I would be to be back there.

We were waiting for the day when Cracow would be liberated. One day our wishes were fulfilled. The good news came that the Germans were driven out from Cracow. We were overjoyed and decided to return to Cracow as fast as possible. But this was not so simple and easy to carry out. The war was still going on, the roads were not safe because there were bombs and mines all around. But my family being so anxious to return to Cracow decided to take a chance and to disregard all the warnings about the danger, which was involved in this trip. There were no trains, no other means of public transportation. Only Russian military vehicles were driving back and forth on the roads.

My family was looking for Russian soldiers who would go to Cracow and who would be willing to take us with them. They asked many Russian soldiers about this but some did not go to Cracow and others refused to take us explaining that it was very risky to travel and they did not want to take the responsibility of exposing us to the danger of being killed by bombs or mines hidden in the ground. My family did not give up so easily the idea of going back to Cracow so they were not discouraged but continued to ask others. Finally after many refusals they found Russian soldiers who were driving to Cracow and who agreed to take us for some bottles of whisky. But they did not have room for all of us so my brother Leo and I remained in Rzeszow to follow them on another time. After a short time of packing they were ready to go. They did not have a much baggage, only several small bags. But they were neatly dressed and wore shoes. If you would be surprised why I stressed wearing shoes, because all the time after leaving the hiding place until we came to Rzeszow, we walked barefoot, because we lost our shoes escaping the falling bombs. So having now shoes was such a special thing for us. We bought shoes in Rzeszow, as also some

clothes and threw away our dirty and shabby clothes, which we never took off in which we slept except when the weather was hot.

My sisters and brother Sam left. We waited anxiously for news from them that they arrived safely. After several days the good news came that after rather a frightening ride they were safe in Cracow and that my sister got an apartment. She was smart, energetic and she went to the housing department, which assigned apartments to families who lived in Cracow but lost their apartments during the war. There were lines of people trying to get an apartment, It was not easy or simple to get one they asked all kinds of questions. But luckily, she got a nice apartment in a residential part of the city. They sent us the address where the house was located.

Now my brother Leo started intensively to search for Russian soldiers who would drive us to Cracow. This time it went a little easier and he found some young soldiers who were willing to take us with them in their military vehicle. I was so excited about going back to Cracow that I could not sleep the night before our departure from Rzeszow. The next day we started the trip very early in the morning. But during the journey my mood changed. The excitement from the day before was replaced by a nerve- racking fear. Every time I heard from a far an explosion of bombs my heart skipped a beat. And these explosions were heard almost all the way to Cracow. Along the roads I saw burned houses, demolished houses, burnt trees, broken trees in the forests. A picture of destruction and devastation. One could see overturned vehicles, even corpses lying on the ground. I averted my eyes away from the dead people. I felt nauseous. To travel in the wartime was very dangerous and risky, there were all over mines in the ground, these were bomb not exploded all over the roads. Our driver, though he was young, was very experienced and took great precautions, watching out for bombs. But one could not be too careful not knowing if there is not a mine underground. Every minute, unexpectedly the vehicle could hit bomb or a mine and our vehicle

could be in seconds demolished to pieces with us inside. It would be preposterous to die almost at the end of the war in such circumstances. I prayed to God to save us. I was thinking about my family in Cracow waiting impatiently for our arrival.

CHAPTER 38

After many hours of tension and gripping fear we were relieved to arrive safely in Cracow. The vehicle stopped in front of a four-story building. A little shaky I got off the vehicle after so many hours of sitting on bumpy roads and cramped in the military vehicle. We went inside the house and there was an elevator who took us to the second floor. My family greeted us with great joy they waited anxiously for our arrival. We were so happy to be together again. After two years of living in hiding and latter in the small towns, this apartment seemed so impressive, so luxurious. Electric lights, running water, a bathroom, balconies and elevator, all these luxuries and such a great comfort about which we forgot completely even existed.

The first thing what I did was to take a hot bath. For such a long time we never took a bath. Being in hiding place only two times we washed our bodies, but the rest of the time we washed only our face and hands with cold water, and in winter time only the hands. And latter after leaving the hiding place we washed our bodies with cold water. At first we did not have any soap, the first time that we washed ourselves with soap was in Rzeszów. But what was amazing we did not have any rash on our skins. How refreshing and delightful was being dipped in warm water. I was so relaxed and did not think about anything. After a good and tasteful meal, we did not eat almost all day; I rested and talked with my family.

When I lay down in a bed and stretched out comfortably I felt so good. For more than two years we did not sleep on a bed. We slept on straw on the ground, or on the floor. I slept on a bed

in Rzeszow for a short time. I fell asleep soundly and slept and slept for many hours. When I woke up at first moment I thought that I was still dreaming. I could not visualize what happened to me and where I was. Everything looked so strange and unusual. After a while I came to my senses and began to remember that I left Rzeszow and I came to Cracow. This was a joyous reality. I thought to myself that finally I was home.

For couple of days I stayed home, rested, ate and listen to the radio. Imagine how marvelous it was to have a radio, To be able to listen to the news, not to depend on rumors, to listen to music. After several days of some kind of intoxication with the new and luxurious conditions of life I decided to venture out to say hello to the city which I loved and longed to see again. Why I did not go out the next day after my arrival? Was it not a pretext to claim that I wanted to rest. May be that unconsciously I was holding back the fear of being disappointed to see a different city than the one I longed for. The same as being reunited with a beloved person after a long separation could produce anxiety about possible changes.

I walked the streets, which I knew so well, I visited the places where I used to play. Went to look at houses where my friends lived. I saw monuments, historical buildings and Wawel. I went to the river Vistula, (Wisloka) where we used to sit with my friends. All these places played such an important role in my young life.

I walked and walked until my legs started to hurt me, I desperately wanted to find a Cracow the same, as it was when I left five years ago. But this was not the same city. At first it was hard to pinpoint why it was a different Cracow. What was changed in the City? But, Cracow was not Cracow anymore. There were the same buildings, the same names of the streets. The city did not show signs of ravages of war. Houses were not burnt; buildings were not destroyed nor demolished.

Stores were open ready for business, people walked the streets, children played and made noise. Tramways and buses were full of people taking rides. And a usual sight of city traffic.

Suddenly the truth hit me. Yes, yes I exactly knew what happened that changed the city forever. There was Cracow without Jews. This realization distressed me. 60.000 Jews lived in Cracow on the eve of World War II. This town without Jews became more provincial. It lost its vitality, dynamics and glamour. The stores were run by others, but lost the spirit of enterprise. The houses in the Jewish quarter were not empty other people moved in. But the houses were not kept and some were rundown. The Jewish quarter called Kazimierz, the name given after a Polish King who invited Jews to settle in Poland in order to develop the polish trade. Before World War II, Jews were a vital part of the Polish population of Cracow. Now the city seemed to be so quiet and subdued. There were no Jewish merchants selling their merchandise, There were no Jewish schools attended by Jewish children, there were no Jewish children playing outside, there were no Jewish workers, there were no more Jewish doctors, scientists, writers, painters, there were no Jewish newspapers, theatre, libraries. There were no religious Jews dressed up for the holidays and hurrying to the synagogues. The synagogues were destroyed, abandoned, the graves broken. The whole Jewish life, Jewish culture was rooted out and stops to exist. Only the ghosts of the perished Jews were flying around.

The realization of this sad reality distressed me greatly. Tired and in a very bad mood I returned home. For several days I stayed home because I had no desire to go out again and to face again the sight of the city without Jews. But my family urged me to go out and not to submit myself up to grief, because it would not help anybody but could do a great harm to my health. Their logic persuaded me and reluctantly I went out from my house.

CHAPTER 39

My family did not meet anybody whom they knew before the war, and not any relatives. It was not yet the end of war and one had a hope that after the liberation and defeat of the Germans the Jews would return to Cracow. In this time we did not know about the great tragedy which befell our nation. Day after day single Jews started to arrive in the city. Jews who came out from bunkers and forests, Jews who survived as Christians, Jews who were in underground organizations and Jews who were partisans. We met also Jewish soldiers who served in the Russian army. We acquainted with Jews who lost their families and Jews who did not know what happened to their families. Before the war the majority of them were living in small towns, villages. But now they were afraid to return to the places where they lived before the war. There were cases that when a Jew returned home and claimed his property or asked to be given back things, which they left in their neighbor's homes, the Poles refused to return, and even happened that they killed them. So they went to live in a bigger city, namely Cracow. There the Jews felt more secure and besides living in a big city had great advantages. There was police and the city administration enforcing laws. There they could meet other Jews and they could get help from the Jewish committee. Because of life threatening danger to which they could be exposed by staying in small towns and villages the remnants of Jewish survivors concentrated in such big city as Cracow.

A Jewish committee was formed right away in order to help all these Jews who had no means to support themselves or had no place to stay. We were in a better situation having an apartment and what to eat. Because we lived in Cracow before the war and lost our apartment it was easier to get one. In our apartment during the occupation lived Germans who escaped; therefore the apartment was available.

Every Jew whom we met was like a brother, not a stranger. Everyone had a different gruesome story to tell. We compared our experiences. Each of them miraculously survived. Every one of them went through a hell. Some of them were young, some of them were old, some were women, some were men, and it even happened that a child survived. Some of the survivors left children in Christian houses but when they came to claim them the people who saved them did not want to return them, and the court had to decide to solve these problems.

We heard many unbelievable stories. Some stories were heartwarming describing the goodness of people, who endangered their own life in helping the hunted Jew, people who were brave, courageous and righteous. On the other hand there were some sad, depressing stories showing bestiality and inhuman savagery of people who for personal gains, or just for kicks, or hatred to Jews killed innocent people. There were people who murdered other human beings mercilessly because their hearts were full of hate and they possessed murderous instincts.

Righteous people were from all walks of life, educated and simple people, very poor and rich, religious and not religious. People of different nationalities: Poles, Ukrainians even Germans. There was a young Jew who hid himself in the forest and who was helped by a thief, who was even in jail for robberies. He was bringing him food. This thief lived in the same village where he lived. This was a very fascinating story.

A group of Jews was hiding in a forest and peasants spotted them making fire, they went to a German soldier who was stationed not far away and denounced the Jews. The German went with the peasants to the forest and arrested the Jews. This group did not have any guns to defend themselves. The peasants left being sure that the German officer would take them to the Gestapo, it was German secret police. The Jews were frightened thinking that it was the end of their life. After the departure of the peasants he said to them not to fear. He assured them that he was not going to

hurt them. He advised them to leave this place right away. He took them in his car and moved them to another part of the forest. He helped them to dig another bunker. For all the duration of his stay in some military unit which was located in the vicinity he supplied them with food. When he was leaving with his unit he left them a large quantity of provisions. This was a German soldier who had a good heart and took pity on human beings that were hunted as wild animals. For sure he was not a Nazi (a member of a German fascist party).

There was a Polish doctor who hid a whole family in his house. There was a young Polish girl who hid an old religious Jew and nobody in her family knew about this. There was a leader in a very anti-Semitic Polish underground, but his comrades did not expect him of being Jewish. Otherwise they would kill him.

Some stories had a happy ending. But most stories were sad, about horrendous suffering to which Jews were subjected and failed to survive. I wanted to mention only one macabre story told by a surviving husband who came back from a concentration camp. His young wife was hiding in the village with her little sister. When the peasant noticed that she was pregnant he wanted to get rid of her. So he murdered her with her child inside. Her little sister he did not kill but he threw her out. The youngster was blond and blue eyed and looked like a Polish girl. She was wandering in the village and when people asked who she was her answer was that she was an orphan. The peasants believed her. She worked very hard on a farm, she was raised as a Christian, and she almost forgot her past and talked and behaved as a country girl. Her brother-in-law had great difficulties finding her in a village. At first she did not recognize him. When he took her back to Cracow, she was bewildered, she was even afraid to go into an elevator. It was a happy ending for her but not for her pregnant sister. There were too many tragic stories. It was painful to hear these stories.

CHAPTER 40

The winter passed. People anxiously waited for the news that Germany was defeated. We were listening to the radio. The news was broadcast from England gave accurate and true information, not the news written in German newspapers which never told the truth about their losses.

It came a moment for which the whole world waited. It was announced that Germany finally capitulated and surrendered. On April 15 the war in Europe ended. It was a great day for the whole- civilized world. The whole humanity celebrated the collapse of Nazi Germany. It was a costly victory in human life but it saved the world from fascism, dictatorship and from returning to barbarism and slavery. Nazi Germany ceased to exist.

After the war the truth about the destination of all the transports of Jews from villages, towns and cities came to light. And the truth was shocking. During the war years Jews lived in an illusion. They wanted to believe that Jews who were deported lived and were working in some places. They did not know that all these people were sent to concentration camps such as: Oswiecim, Majdanek, Tremblinka and many others, where they were burnt. The German genius invented a very sophisticated method of mass murder. It was an ingenious plan of annihilation of millions of people in gas chambers in a short time. It was carried out with efficiency and precision. How could someone of sound mind imagine such an unimaginable bestiality? The ovens in concentration camps were very busy, burning human bodies day and night without any stop and a dense, dark smoke was coming out from the chimneys and towered high in the sky. If the smoke could talk it would tell about the macabre of human suffering. The ovens were not short of fuel

because another one followed one transport of Jews and this was going on continuously. The Germans were in a hurry to accomplish their goals.

A crime of such a magnitude could not be comprehended by reason and explained rationally. One could wonder how this could happen in the twenty century in a civilized world.

When American and Russian soldiers liberated the camps they were shocked by the picture of human misery and deterioration. Many soldiers cried. They found surviving Jews in an extremely bad shape, skinny to such a degree that almost was no meat on their bones, with sunken eyes. It was a pity to look at them. But the will to live still was burning in their emaciated bodies. With great joy they welcomed their liberators and they kissed their hands.

Sick people were placed in hospitals, other who were in a better conditions were placed in a camp where they could gain their strength. When they felt stronger they left the camps and started to arrive in Cracow. The Jewish committee who operated in Cracow found lodging for them and provided them with some money for food. They were single people who were looking for their relatives, hoping that may be someone from their families survived. Mostly of the time they were disappointed not finding anybody. Only a few lucky one met a surviving relative. They mourned the lost ones; they were not only broken physically but also mentally. A time was needed to heal their wounds.

Jews in hiding places, in forests or on Christian papers (pretending to be Christian) suffered a lot, but their bad experiences could be described and besides there was a chance of survival. But any language could not express the horrendous experiences of Jews in concentration camps. There were no proper words, which could describe the bestiality to which they were exposed day after day. There was almost no chance of staying alive. Our happiness of surviving the war was marred by the great tragedy of our nation. We cried and cried and could not stop.

CHAPTER 41

We too were looking for

relatives. From all our large family only my mother's cousin survived in a concentration camp. She lost a husband, a child and a brother. She stayed with us, but after a very scary experience she left Poland. Jews who had no where to stay were placed in a building which before the war was a dormitory for Jewish students. One day my mother's cousin went to visit a friend from the concentration camp who lived there.

One day unexpectedly a mob of Poles surrounded this house and started calling nasty, offensive names and threatened to kill all the Jews inside. The frightened Jews locked the entrance door but this was not of great help. The mob armed with sticks and knives started to storm the door and to try to break it. Scarred Jews not knowing what to do ran to the attic. It was only a matter of minutes before they would succeed in entering the building. In the last minute a miracle happened. A Jewish soldier in the Russian army happened to pass this street where this house was located.

He heard screams and saw the mob breaking the door. Right away he figured out what was happening. Not giving a second thought he took out his gun and started to shoot in the air.

And he was shouting at them if they would not leave right away he was going to shoot them.

The mob dispersed momentarily and ran way fast. He saved the Jews inside. These holocaust survivors were very fortunate that a Jewish soldier was in the right place and in the right time to save them.

In the same day there were several incidents of Jews being killing by Poles. It was how the survivors who came back were welcomed by the city. This experience made such a strong

impression on my mother's cousin Frymka, she did not want to stay any longer in Poland, she packed her meager belonging and she left Cracow, crossed the Polish border illegally and went to Paris.

There were other violent acts against the Jews in Cracow. There were riots and an accusation of ritual murder. The sentiments of some of the Poles were shown during the funerals of holocaust survivors who were killed in the city Nowy Targ. Seeing so many Jews who gathered to give their last respect to the innocent victims, they loudly expressed their disappointment making a comment "from which chimney did so many Jews come out".

One night a loud knocking at our door suddenly awakened us. We were wondering who it might be. I was scared because it reminded me our experience in the town Mielec when the police knocked at our door and their intention was to kill us.

When we opened the door there was no police but there were standing frightened Jews who escaped from the pogrom in Kielce. They came to sleep over in our house. Even with all these sad incidents in the city, it was safer to live in a big city, than in a small one.

Day after day there were bad news about sporadic killings of Jews in villages, towns and cities. They were committed or by hate or by greed. But it did not make any difference because whatever was the cause the results were just the same. The Jews were in consternation. After years of constant humiliation, immeasurable suffering, when the war ended they hoped that finally they would find some peace in their broken life. They did not expect to be again exposed to danger. But now they were free people and could not accept this situation and to live in such hostile atmosphere.

More than half of disillusioned holocaust survivors decided to leave the country for other countries hoping to find a more favorable environment to start a new life. The exodus of Jews had

begun on a great scale. Among the leaving Jews were my brothers. We girls stayed. There were Jews who remained in Cracow because of various circumstances. Some were too depressed to start a new journey. Some were lacking strength, energy or courage. It was not an easy undertaking to go to a strange country without the knowledge of the language and without any means, and besides there was involved some risk. There were some who believed that the government would eliminate the criminal element and enforce law and order.

CHAPTER 42

We had a big family from my mother's side and from my father's side. We had aunts, uncles, cousins, once removed, twice removed, and many more distant relatives. Our family lived in the east of Poland, in the west of Poland, in small towns, in cities, even in villages. It was a middle class family, rich and poor, educated and less educated. But all of them honest, hard working people, with family values, moral and religious. My grand parents were proud that never were in court. Our family lived for many, many years in Poland. Probably my ancestors came from Russia in one time and settled in Poland. Before World War II, almost nobody from my family emigrated to other countries. I was told that my father had a dream and wanted to immigrate to United States but his parents held him back. They were a close family and did not want to be separated from him. My father was an obedient son so he listened to them. He gave up his dream and stayed in Poland. Our life would turn out differently if he would follow his dream and disobey his parents. We would be spared so much suffering. We were fortunate to survive, but we could easily share the fate of millions to be burned in gas chamber. Being in hiding place we were thinking about our relatives wondering what happened to them.

Now being free we tried hard to find out what happened to them. We were heartbroken to find out that unfortunately all my relatives perished but my mother's cousin who survived in concentration camp. I mentioned about this before. The majority of my closest relatives were burnt in gas chambers. A relative and her sister's little boy were hidden by the peasant called the Polish police because he knew that she had money, not Polish money, which had no great value, only dollars. He did not intend to hide them and to save only he was greedy and wanted to rob her. She managed before the police killed them to tear to small pieces the money. They lived in Debica where we stayed after leaving Cracow. She was a pretty young woman and the little boy was adorable, blond, blue eyed. Her husband survived in Russia.

My Uncle Moses, his wife went to hide to a peasant. They did not survive but we did not know what happened to them. Their youngest son David had papers to show that he was a Christian and was working in Germany as a Pole. He did not survive, but we did not know what happened to him if they recognizes that he was Jewish. Their older son Samuel blond, blue eyed looked as Polish boy and he had good papers and lived as a Christian in Warsaw. He would survive if not a blunder that he made. He had a girl friend in Debica and he wrote letters to her. A worker in post office recognized his handwriting, and the letter was from Warsaw this gave him a clue that he was hiding in Warsaw. He denounced him to the police. They had the address on the envelope so they went there and arrested him. We did know how he died. His beautiful sister Hanka, also light blond, blue eyed was working in Cracow as a made in a Polish house. They did not have the slightest idea that she was Jewish. They liked her very much because she was a very good worker. But also she could easily survive because of her looks. She had a boy friend who was at this time in the city of Tarnow. She had a day off on the weekend so she decided to visit her friend. She had

bad luck, unfortunately in that day In Tarnow there was an action {the Germans surrounded the ghetto, killing Jews or taking them for transportation) and she was caught by the Germans.

Many of our relatives were living in small towns of Eastern Poland. My uncle From Hersh was a manager of a village and a mansion, which belonged to a Polish count. Before World War II the anti-Semitism in Poland was growing and the count was pressured to remove him from his job. My uncle lost his job. He and his wife and two sons decided to immigrate to United States. But the war broke out and they were stocked in Poland. They tried to find a peasant who was willing to hide them but they did not succeed and they were deported. Their two beautiful sons managed to escape from the transport and went to join the partisans in the forest. When they walked through a village the Ukrainian police stopped them, since they knew them. Everyone in those villages knew them. They ordered them to kiss each other and in cold blood they shot them. This tragic event was told to us by a peasant from this village. In what circumstances the rest of our large family perished we could not find out.

Our friends and acquaintances from Deduca did not survive the war. All these beautiful children, boys and girls whom my brother Sam was teaching, perished in concentration camps. Their young lives and their dreams were gone forever. The tailor who was our landlord, their son, two unmarried daughters, the married son, his wife and little son were killed. What happened to my friend Bronek and family who left Cracow to cross the border to the part of Poland occupied in this time by Russians I failed to find out.

Franka who went to town Kiele to stay with one of sisters perished in concentration Camp. This was told by her sister who survived as a Christian.

Zenek, who managed to escape from Debica after the liquidation of the ghetto of Debica went by train to Cracow and was in Plaszow camp in Podgorze. Commander Goetz, who was

hanged by the Poles after the war, killed him on the spot. (He was mentioned in Schindler's list movie.)

My pretty friend Sydia, with green, dreamy eyes perished with her parents, brother and sister in a concentration camp.

My friend Cesia, good- hearted, who had a dream to become a doctor, perished with her family in concentration camp.

These were the tragic end of all these characters about which I wrote in my book. It was for me very painful that no one even survived.

CHAPTER 43

Jews had no other alternative as to put the morbid past behind them and to continue to live. Though this was not an easy task but they did it. Was this a strong impulse to live, or was this a response to Jewish enemies who wanted to root out Jewishness from the face of the world and to annihilate the Jewish nation, who gave so much to the world? It could be a combination of both. Single people longing for love and companionship got married. New life was rooted and blossomed. And children were born.

After a period of sadness and mourning our healing began and we organized our life as best as we could to lead a normal life. Being young helped a lot to overcome the state of deep sadness. I started a new chapter in my life. I went to school and I had new friends. I had many dreams, desires and expectations and life was so exciting. I never forgot the past and the bad experiences but the past lurked in the back of my head.

I lived many years in Cracow, where I finished Jagielonski Uniwersytet, and got a Masters Degree. After years of accomplishments, happiness and disappointments I left Cracow and came to United States and started a new chapter in life.

